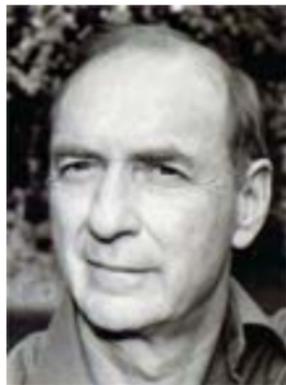


Beliefs without Boundaries

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One of the most important crises facing the world today is that of conflicting beliefs. Contrasting beliefs in religion, the political good, economics, the environment, and rights to ownership - among others - are everywhere apparent. Technologies are also available to permit any group of believers to move globally, and to inflict harm on those

who are “wrong,” “evil,” or “unjust.” It is precisely in this context that I believe social constructionism delivers one of its most important messages: when we understand that all beliefs are constructed in relationships, the impulse to shed blood to protect the good is replaced by the desire for dialogue. For the constructionist, strong beliefs in a way of life or a religious creed grow naturally from our existence in relationships. That people are deeply nurtured and sustained by such beliefs is all to the good. Strong beliefs become threatening, however, when they become statements of the really real, the

truly true, or the ultimate good. Here they eliminate all other possibilities; they are beyond negotiation, which is to say, beyond further dialogue. In cases of conflicting beliefs, social construction places a premium on the restoration of dialogue. It is with deep hopes for the future that the Taos Institute advances the cause of Appreciative Inquiry, The Public Conversations Project, Narrative Mediation, the Coordinated Management of Meaning, the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation, and related investments in peace through relationship.