Are Beliefs about God Central to the Self?

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Presented at the 2018 Meeting for the Eastern Psychological Association, Philadelphia, PA
“...[M]an never attains a true self-knowledge until he have previous contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.”

- John Calvin

Institutes of The Christian Religion, 1.2.1
The Self & Beliefs

- The self-concept is one’s theory about internal attributes and the **external world** (Chen et al., 2016; Epstein, 1973; Koltko-Rivera, 2004).

- Just as people value some internal attributes more than others (Crocker & Park, 2003), **beliefs outside the self vary in value**.

- **Beliefs that offer powerful explanations for the world are highly valued beliefs; they are more meaningful, relevant, and important than other beliefs** (Preston & Epley, 2005).
## High-Value Beliefs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Government</th>
<th>God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a Structure to Reality</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce Existential Anxiety</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Personal Control</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Farias, et al., 2013; Jonas & Fischer, 2006; Kay, Gaucher, et al., 2008; Kay, Whitson et al., 2009; Kay, Gaucher, et al., 2010; Landau et al., 2004; Rutjens, et al., 2013
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_Institutes of The Christian Religion, 1.2.1_
Calvin’s Hypothesis

Are Beliefs about God Central Beliefs?

Chen, Urminsky, & Bartels, 2016; Zunick, Teeny, & Fazio, 2017
Do people knowingly value God-beliefs in ways comparable to other self-relevant beliefs?
Sex
- Males
- Females

Political Orientation
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Other

Belief in God
- Believer
- Unsure
- Unbeliever

Religious/Spiritual
- Religious
- Spiritual
- Religious + Spiritual
- Neither

N = 55
$M_{\text{age}} = 20.71$
$SD_{\text{age}} = 1.88$
Central Beliefs Study

Regardless of what your beliefs about XXXX, indicate …

1. **how important those beliefs are to you.**
2. **how often you think about those beliefs.**
3. **how often those beliefs influence your decisions in your daily life.**
4. **how much those beliefs impact your attitude about other aspects of your life.**
5. **how much those beliefs influence the things you value or cherish about your life.**
6. **how much those beliefs define you as a person.**

Less Self-Relevance 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 Greater Self-Relevance
$t(17.79) = 1.78, p = .092$

$\text{SELF-RELEVANT BELIEFS}$

$\text{WORLDVIEW BELIEFS}$
$t(17.73) = 3.41, p = .003$
Most Important College Politics God

Self-Relevance Ratings

Self-Relevant Beliefs

Worldview Beliefs

$t(18.02) = 1.23, p = .234$
Are beliefs about God central to the self?

- God-beliefs have a *particular* association with the self-concept.

- People report that their beliefs about God are as self-relevant as explicitly self-relevant beliefs, but this is not the case for beliefs about politics, even though they serve similar psychological functions as God-beliefs.

- More work is needed to adapt methods used to identify *central beliefs* (Chen, Urminsky, & Bartels, 2016) and the *priority beliefs* (Zunick, Teeny, & Fazio, 2017) to beliefs about God.
Thank you

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