

# **Psychological Science Meets the World of Faith**

David G. Myers

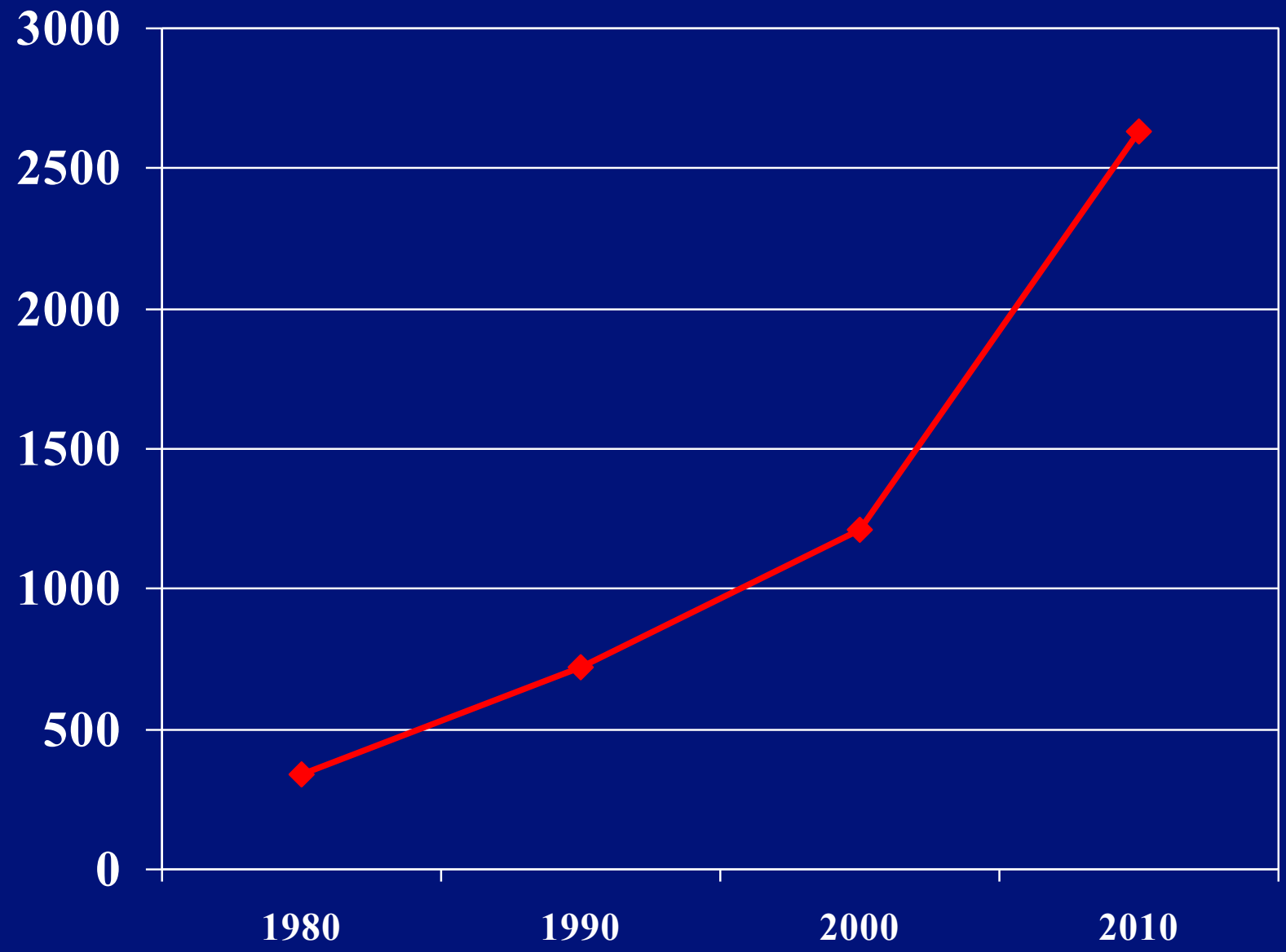
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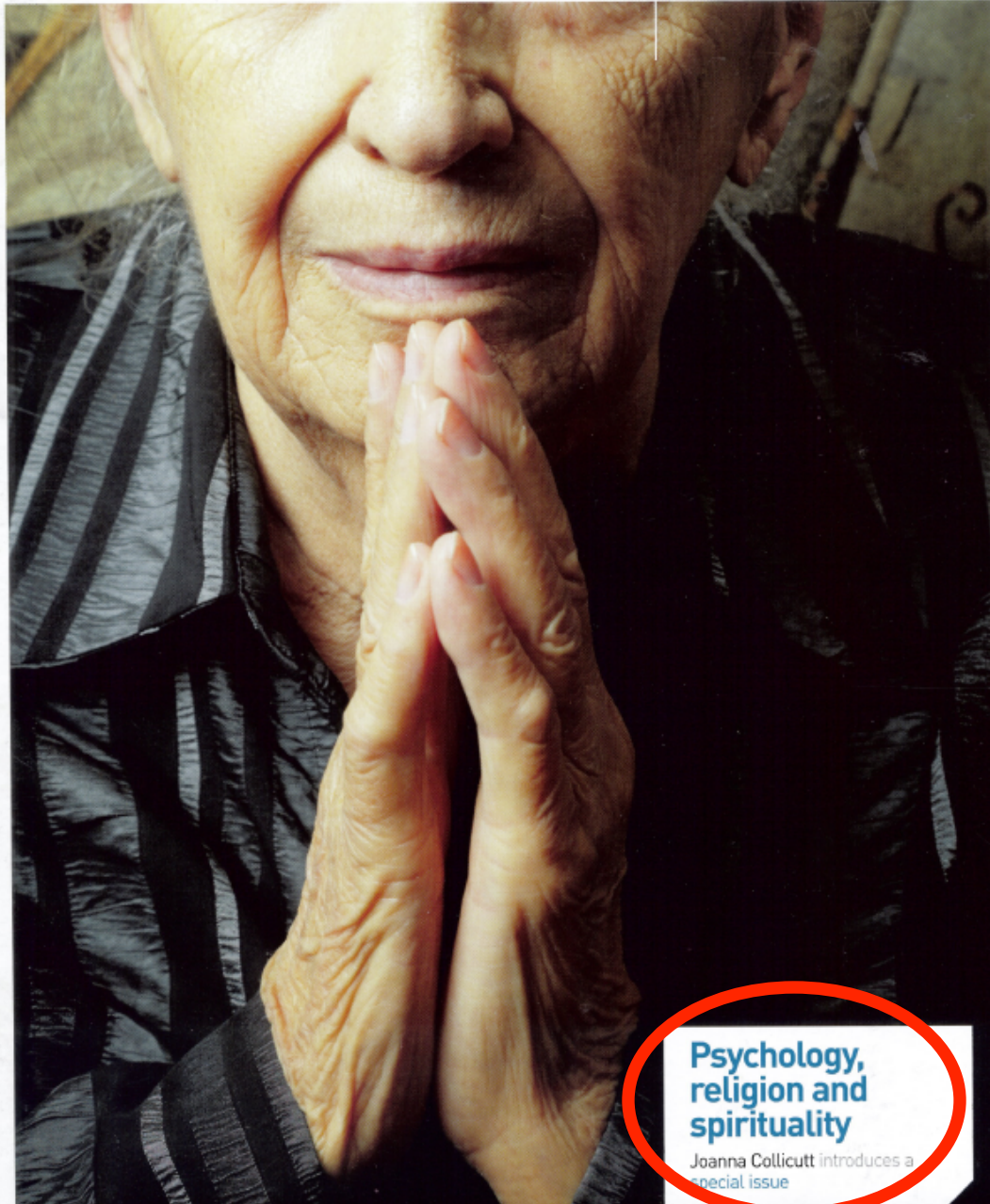
4 October 2013

# “psychology and religion” proportional frequency in Google books, 1850-2000



# Number of PsychINFO articles with keywords “religion,” “religious,” or “religiosity”





**Psychology,  
religion and  
spirituality**

Joanna Collicutt introduces a  
special issue

# Seven Ways to Relate Psychology and Faith

Not on this evening's menu:

- Faith-inspired values in research and practice
- Applying psychology in faith communities
- Special topics: prejudice, prayer, sexual orientation

The hors d'œuvres:

- Faith motivates science & skeptical scrutiny
- Relating psychological and religious descriptions of human nature
- Studying psychology of religion and irreligion

The main course:

- Studying outcomes of religion: *is religion associated more with harm or good?*

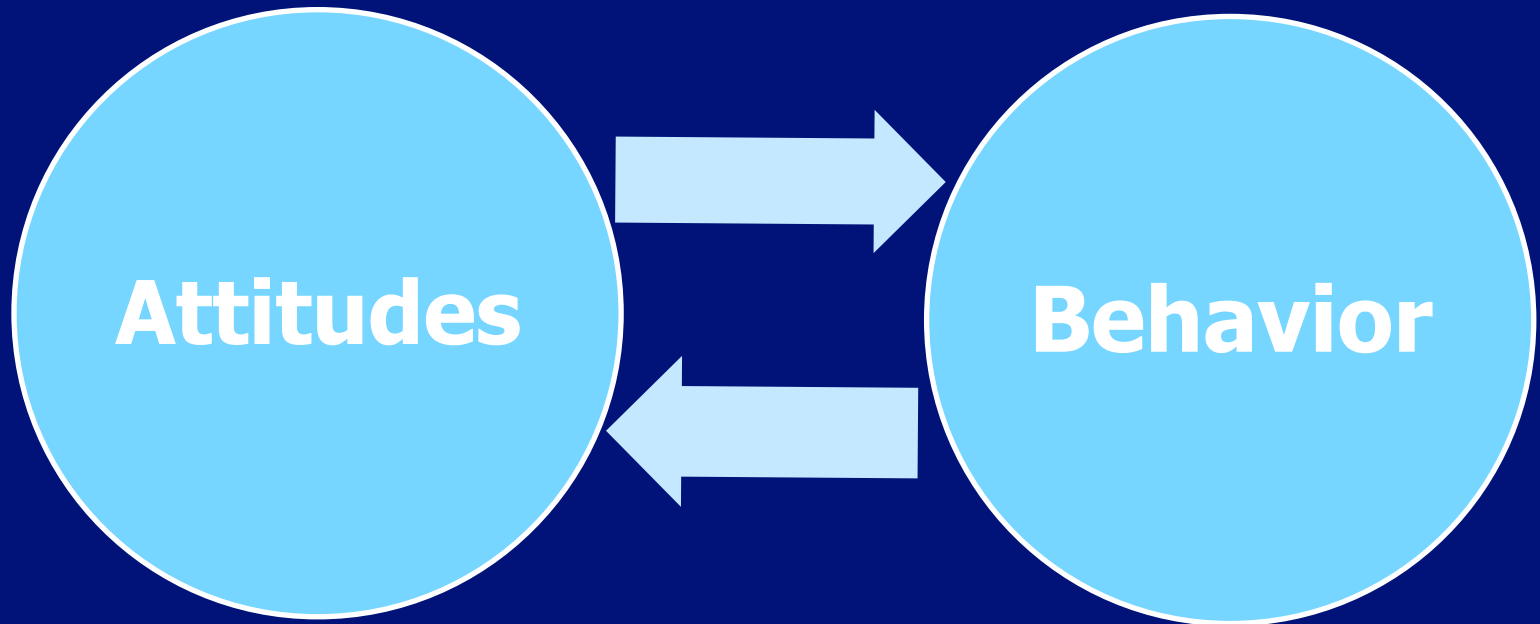
# Science, Reason, and Faith

- The religious mandate for science:
  - Two assumptions of theism:
    - There is a God.
    - It's not me (or you).
  - Ergo, we should
    - hold our own untested beliefs tentatively,
    - assess others' ideas with open-minded skepticism, and
    - when appropriate, use observation and experimentation to winnow error from truth.

# Science, Reason, and Faith

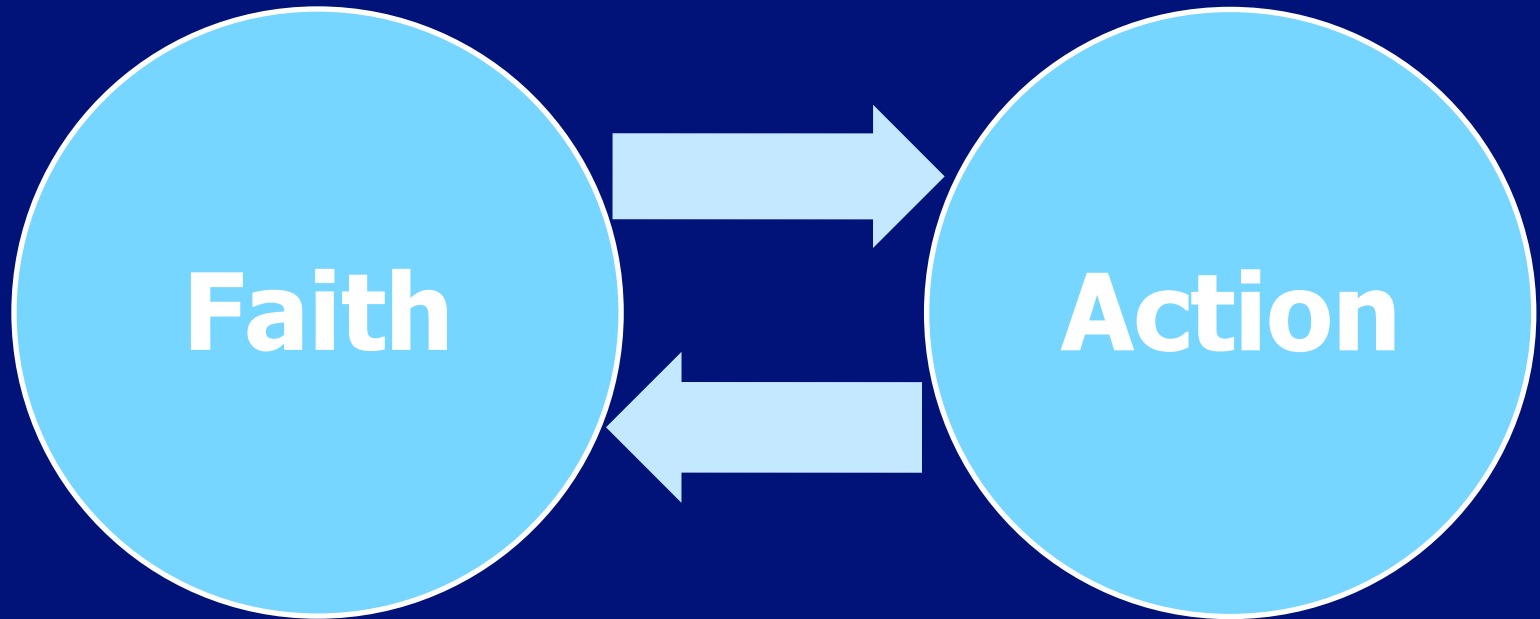
- Moses: “If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and what he says does not come true, then it is not the Lord’s message.”
- Jeremiah: “When the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.”
- Paul: “Test everything, hold fast to what is good.”
- My own religious heritage: “reformed and ever-reforming.”

# Psychological Research and Christian Belief: Complementary Principles





# Psychological Research and Christian Belief: Complementary Principles



# Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, 2012

Traditional church model:



Emerging church model:



# Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

## ■ Brain and Mind

- a. Brain enables mind
- b. Mind controls brain

## ■ Body and Spirit

- a. We are bodies alive
- b. We are created for spiritual relationship

“When they breathe their last, they return to earth, and in that day their thoughts perish.”

Psalm 146:3

# Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

## ■ Self-serving bias and self-esteem

- a. S-S bias is powerful & perilous
- b. S-E & positive thinking pay dividends

## ■ Pride and Grace

- a. Pride is the fundamental sin
- b. To experience grace is to feel unconditional acceptance

# Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

## ■ Social & Personal Control

- a. We are the creatures of our social worlds
- b. We are the creators of our social worlds

## ■ Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility

- a. God is ultimately in control
- b. We have responsibility

# Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

## ■ Rationality & Irrationality

- a. Our cognition is awesome
- b. To err is human

## ■ Divine Image Yet Finite

- a. We are made in God's image
- b. We are finite creatures

**Do explanations of religion  
(evolutionary, neuroscientific,  
cognitive, and socio-cultural)  
*explain religion away?***

# NewScientist

THE NEW SCIENTIST  
February 4, 2009

**Born believers: How your brain creates God**  
**By Michael Brooks**



# **Explaining a belief does not explain it away**

“You believe that I believe what I believe  
because of the way I was brought up,  
because of the way you were brought up.”

~Archbishop William Temple

1949 (Dutch), 1952 (English)

**The Psychology of Unbelief:  
character and temperament in  
relation to unbelief**

by Rumke, Henricus Cornelius

# InvestigatingAtheism.info



## Investigating Atheism

Atheism: from the greek 'a' - without, 'theos' - god

You are here: Home

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## Investigating Atheism

Welcome to the "Investigating Atheism" project.



*Marx and Lenin in Heaven, illustration from 'Simplicissimus' magazine,*

Since the publication of Sam Harris' *The End of Faith* in 2005, the English speaking world has seen a spate of books on atheism, most notoriously perhaps Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* (2006). The publication of Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great* (2007), and Michel Onfray's '*Atheist Manifesto*' (2007), among others, have added to and expanded on the debate. However,

### Selected Features

- » [Contemporary Atheists](#)
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- » [Arguments For Disbelief](#)
- » [Atheism & Meaning](#)
- » [Physics](#)
- » [Psychology](#)
- » [Links](#)

*Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, January 2013

# **The origins of religious disbelief**

**Ara Norenzayan<sup>1</sup> and Will M. Gervais<sup>2</sup>**

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**Would a successful psychology  
of *irreligion* explain away  
atheism?**

**(With tongue partly in cheek, let's have  
a little go at this.)**

# Skepticism's Maleness and Paleness

- *Skeptical Inquirer's* 2011 "Pantheon of Skeptics": *27 male, 0 female*
- Prometheus book authors 2010 "science and the paranormal" section: *98 male, 4 female*
- Skeptics Society survey: *4 in 5 respondents male*
- NY Times on the audience at 2010 Council for Secular Humanism atheism confab: *"largely white and male crowd — imagine a Star Trek convention, but older."*
- Irreligiosity:
  - Weekly worship
  - Daily prayer: 4
  - Ditto race differ
  - Americans and



n 4 White

# Gender website demographics

(from quantcast.com, 1/25/09)

Google.com

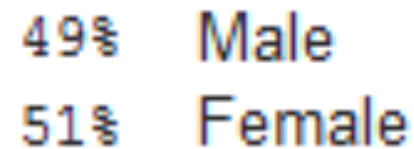
US Demographics 

Dec 2008



Hope.edu

US Demographics 



# Gender website demographics

(from quantcast.com, 1/25/09)

## GoodHousekeeping.com

US Demographics ?

Dec 2008



## SI.com

US Demographics ?

Dec 2008



## BeliefNet.com

US Demographics ?

Dec 2008



## RichStepDawson.net

US Demographics ?

Dec 2008





**End Part I:  
Questions, Comments?**