

THE BELIEF IN GOD AND IMMORTALITY
A Psychological, Anthropological and Statistical Study

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page 221 to page 281 (discontinuous extracts - paragraphs, or pages - are separated by
 xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx). I have **highlighted in red** passages of special interest
 (March, 2007).

CHAPTER IX

**INVESTIGATION C: THE BELIEF IN GOD AND IN IMMORTALITY AMONG
 AMERICAN SCIENTISTS, SOCIOLOGISTS, HISTORIANS AND
 PSYCHOLOGISTS**

In this investigation, I was able to make use of *American Men of Science*, a volume containing about fifty-five hundred names, and of the membership lists of the American Historical Association, the American Sociological Society, and the American Psychological Association. Any one familiar with these lists will know that their standard of inclusion is rather too low than too high; it would be easy to single out from the membership of the American Psychological Association many persons who could hardly be offended if denied the right to be called psychologists. I say this in order that it may not be imagined that this inquiry deals only with men of very high achievements.

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The chief difficulty in the way of statistical investigations such as the present one, is that not all those addressed answer. This may introduce a type of selection that vitiates results. In order to minimize as much as possible this cause of error, I formulated possible beliefs, and requested the recipients of the Q. to mark with a cross all those that were true for them, and I inclosed addressed and stamped envelopes. A minimum of time and thought for answering was thus required. This procedure had the additional advantage of getting all answers in the same forms.

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The *Questionnaires* sent to the two groups of five hundred scientists follow. A slightly different set of questions was sent to the second five hundred and to the other groups. These changes are commented upon below.

A STATISTICAL INQUIRY

(First Form)

Conflicting statements are confidently made regarding the prevalence among civilized Christian nations of the belief in God and in Personal Immortality. Nevertheless sufficient data are not extant to support any opinion.

The accompanying questions are sent to 500 persons taken by chance from those listed in *American Men of Science*, in the hope of securing statistics valid for this whole group. **The condition of success is that all those addressed respond. No satisfactorily definite conclusions could be drawn if many of those addressed refused or neglected to answer.**

It will take you only a few seconds to make a mark to the right of every statement true for you. Please do it, if at all possible, on receipt of this paper and return it in the inclosed stamped envelope. Your answer may be anonymous.

A. CONCERNING THE BELIEF IN GOD.

1. **I believe in a God in intellectual and affective communication with man, I mean a God to whom one may pray in the expectation of receiving an answer. By "answer," I do not mean the subjective, psychological effect of prayer.**
2. **I do not believe in a God defined above.**
3. **I am an agnostic.**

B. CONCERNING THE BELIEF IN PERSONAL IMMORTALITY.

1. I believe in
 - Personal I for all men.
 - Conditional I, i. e., for those who have reached a certain state of development.
2. I believe neither in conditional nor in unconditional I of the person.
3. I am an agnostic.
4. Although I cannot believe in P. I., I desire it
 - Intensely.
 - Moderately.
5. I do not desire P.I.

(Second Form) **A. CONCERNING THE BELIEF IN GOD.**

1. I believe in a God to whom one may pray in the expectation of receiving an answer. *By "answer," I mean more than the subjective, psychological effect of prayer.*
2. I do not believe in a God *as defined above.*
3. I have no definite belief regarding this question.

B. CONCERNING THE BELIEF IN PERSONAL IMMORTALITY, I. E., THE BELIEF IN CONTINUATION OF THE PERSON AFTER DEATH IN ANOTHER WORLD.

1. I believe in
 - Personal Immortality for all men.
 - Conditional Immortality, i. e., Immortality for those who have reached a certain state of development.
2. I believe neither in conditional nor in unconditional Immortality of the person **in another world.**
3. I have no definite belief regarding this question
4. I desire personal immortality
 - Intensely
 - Moderately
 - Not at all

Remarks upon the changes made in the second form of the Q.: --

1. I thought it advisable to leave out the words "in intellectual and affective communication with man" which appear in A 1 of the Q. sent to the first division of 500 scientists. The meaning is sufficiently indicated in the rest of the sentence. By substituting in the same statement "I mean more than," for "I do not mean," the intended meaning becomes clearer and the sense is not changed.
2. Instead of "I am an agnostic," I wrote in the revised Q., both in sections A and B, "I have no definite belief regarding this question." The meaning ascribed by my correspondents to these two formulations will be discussed later.
3. **The heading of section B was extended in the second form by the addition of "i. e., the belief in continuation of the person after death in another world." This addition excludes cases of belief in transmigration at death in animal or human forms living on the earth.** Few answers if any could have been affected by the change. A similar addition was made to statement B 2.

4. In the first Q., the questions regarding desire for immortality are addressed only to those who do not believe; in the second Q., they are addressed to all alike: believers, disbelievers, and doubters., The answers made to B 4 by the first division are therefore not comparable with those made to B 4 by the second division.

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C. THE, INTERPRETATION OF A 2 AND B 2³

These statements do not necessarily imply a conviction of the non-existence of God and of immortality. They may mean merely the *absence* of the conviction of their existence. In that case statements A 2 and B 2 have approximately the same meaning as statements A 3 and B 3 (agnosticism or absence of definite belief). But, although the Q. asks that every statement "true for you" be marked, only a small percentage of those who marked 3, marked also 2. One may, therefore, probably regard the majority of those who marked A 2 and B 2, and not also A 3 and B 3, as desirous of doing more than affirm the absence of the belief in God and immortality, they may be taken to have intended to express positive belief in their non-existence. **[this is contradictory with what is said down below - note added by reader in March 2007]**

Readers may ask themselves why I did not formulate statements which would have separated more definitely those who merely lack the beliefs expressed in A 1 and B 1, from those ready to affirm their falsity. But can a sharp line of demarcation be drawn between these two attitudes? Evidently not; the terms, *belief*, *unbelief*, *doubt*, *uncertainty*, are susceptible of endless gradation. "The questions do not provide for degrees and intensities," complains one of those who returned a blank Q. This is unfortunately true, but in attempting to refine, I should probably have made matters worse. As a matter of fact, few were seriously troubled by the indefiniteness of these terms, and my purpose was as well, perhaps better served by the statements of the Q., as by any others; for, the persons who could affirm a belief in the two great propositions of Christianity are actually separated from those who could not; and, in addition, those who were willing to do more than affirm absence of belief and doubt, were enabled to do so, and usually did so, by marking A 2 and B 2, without marking also A 3 and B 3.

A 2: I do not believe in God as defined above. B 2: I believe neither in conditional nor in unconditional immortality of the person.
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II. THE SCIENTISTS

This part of Investigation C is based upon answers received from 1000, persons chosen by a rule of chance from *American Men of Science*. It is separated, for a reason already indicated, into two divisions of 500 each; and these again fall into two subdivisions including 300 persons of of greater distinction.

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The Beliefs in God and Immortality. -- In the two divisions of scientists taken together, the believers in God (A 1) amount to 41.8 per cent. of the number of those who answered. If we put together the disbelievers, (41.5 per cent.), i. e., those who marked A 2, and the *agnostics* or *doubters*, i. e., those who marked A 3, we get 58.2 per cent. of *non-believers*.⁶

If the lesser men are compared with the greater, the number of believers become, for the former, 48.2 per cent. of the lesser men who answered; and for the greater men, 31.6 per cent. of the greater men who answered. Thus it appears that, among the lesser men, believers and non-believers are nearly equal, while over two thirds of the greater men are not able to affirm belief in the God of the Christian churches. The reliability of these figures, when taken to indicate a difference due to intellectual ability and knowledge, and to traits making for success in the professions concerned, might be questioned if quite similar differences were not found in every one of the other groups, both regarding God and immortality.

I shall use this term throughout, to designate by one term both those who marked A2 (the disbelievers) and those who marked A3 (the agnostics or doubters)

In this group, as well as in every other, the number of believers in immortality is larger than the number of believers in God. This is an interesting fact. When the two divisions are taken together, the believers in immortality are found to be very nearly equal to the non-believers, the proportions are respectively 50.6 per cent. and 49.4 per cent. If we compare the lesser with the greater men, we get 59.3 per cent. of lesser, against 36.9 per cent. of greater believers.

Among the greater men, believers, disbelievers, and agnostics or doubters, number each about one third of the total number of those who returned an answer.

If, instead of taking the two divisions together, we consider them separately, differences of the same kind, but a little less for the first, and somewhat larger for the second division are to be observed with regard to both beliefs (see [chart IV](#)). The difference between the lesser and the greater men of the second division is shown by the figures 45.5 per cent. and 27.7 per cent., for believers in God; and by 52.8 per cent. and 35.2 per cent., for believers in immortality.

It is noteworthy that the number of those who announce agnostic or indefinite opinions concerning immortality is greater than the number of disbelievers. This is especially marked among the greater men of the second division: disbelievers, 25.4 per cent.; agnostics and doubters, 43.7 per cent. They feel much less hesitation in affirming disbelief in God: disbelievers, 52.7 per cent.; doubtful opinions, 20.9 per cent.⁷ It would be interesting to know how far the recent efforts of the *Psychical Researchers* have led to a shift from disbelief in immortality to a suspension of judgment.

Comparison of the Physical with the Biological Scientists; Second Division. -- The biologists produce a much smaller number of believers in God and in immortality than the physicists (see [chart V](#)). The figures are, for the believers in God: physicists, 43.9 per cent; biologists, 30.5 per cent; and for the believers in immortality, 50.7 per cent. against 37 per cent.

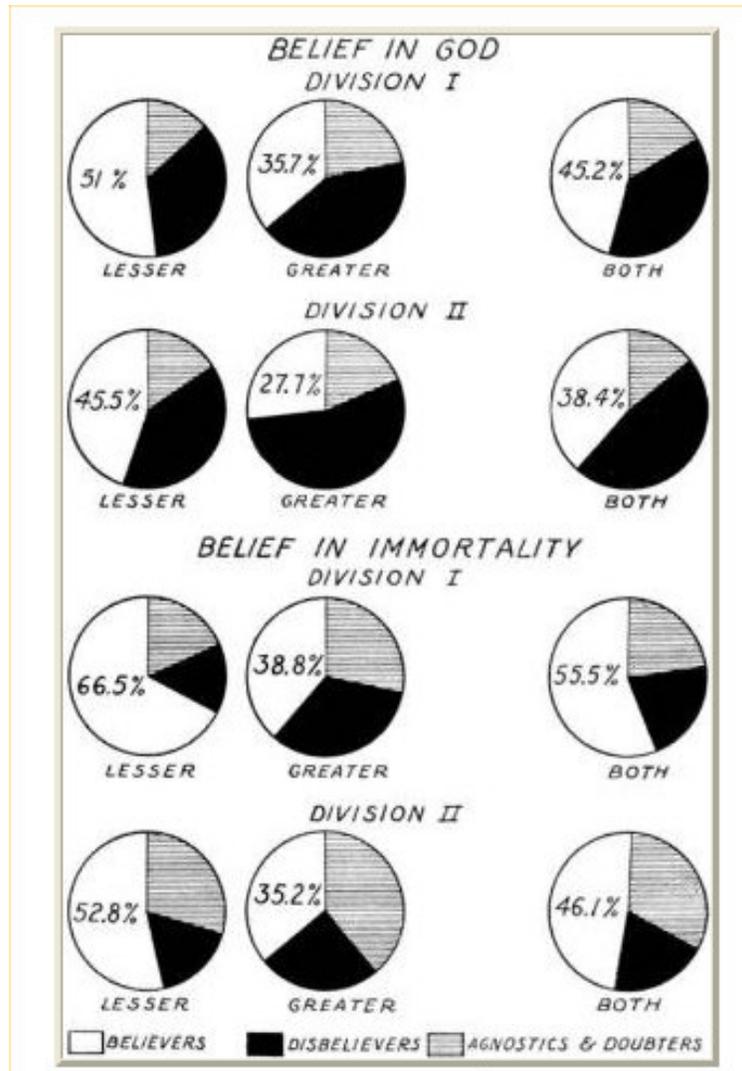
There are fewer believers among the greater men, whether physicists or biologists. The smallest percentage of believers is found among the greater biologists; they count only 16.9 per cent. of believers in God and 25.4 per cent. of believers in immortality. As many as 59.3 per cent. of greater biologists express disbelief in God, and 31.7 per cent. in immortality. The discussion of these interesting figures had best be deferred until the results from the other groups have been set forth.

In several instances the percentages given in the text for believers, disbelievers, and agnostics or doubters, sum up to more than one hundred. The reason of this anomaly is that some persons marked both disbelief and agnosticism or doubt (statements 2 and 3). Among the men of science, for instance, 15 lesser and 11 greater men of division I, and 5 lesser and 2 greater men of division II marked both A2 and A3; in no other group did this happen as frequently.

In the graphic representations I counted as disbelievers all those who marked both statements. **[this is contradictory with what is said higher above - note added by reader in March 2007]**

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CHART IV



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CHART X THE SIGNED AND UNSIGNED ANSWERS Notes: -- The figures in this table are percentages of the total number of lesser or of greater men, or of both, as the case may be. The upper figure in each group of two refers to the signed, the lower to the unsigned answers.

		Believers	Disbelievers	Agnostics or Doubters	Non- believers
Scientists — Division II	Lesser	60.7	26.9	12.4	...
		34.9	44.9	20.1	...
	Greater	34.6	46.2	19.2	...
		23.5	55.1	21.4	...
	Both	51.1	34.	14.9	48.9
		30.4	48.9	20.6	69.5
Historians	Lesser	70.	26.7	3.3	...
		58.1	39.7	2.3	...
	Greater	51.1	33.3	5.6	...
		23.1	53.9	23.1	...
	Both	66.7	29.2	4.2	33.3
		38.9	47.4	13.6	61.1
Sociologists	Lesser	35.7	57.1	7.1	...
		19.4	61.3	19.4	...
	Greater	66.7	25.6	7.7	...
		48.8	33.8	17.5	...
	Both	58.5	33.9	7.5	41.5
		40.5	41.4	18.	59.5

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VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS FROM THE STATISTICS

Although I have from time to time drawn attention to the most striking results of this statistical inquiry and to their significance, a brief summary and some additional comments seem to be required in this place.

I have claimed that the investigation provides relatively exact information concerning the beliefs in God and in immortality of college students and of several classes of men of high attainments. I have further claimed that this information is valid for all students in the non-technical departments of American colleges and universities of the first rank, when the first rank is taken to mean approximately the upper third of all recognized colleges; and for all the American scientists, historians, sociologists, and psychologists, when these designations are used in as broad a sense as by the official organizations of these different groups.

This second claim need not be accepted merely on the strength of the affirmation of statisticians who declare that the fractions of the whole groups upon which our several investigations bear are sufficient to make the results representative of the entire groups. **The 1000 scientists to whom the questionnaires were to be sent were separated into two divisions of 500 each. A comparison of these two divisions (table IV) provides adequate justification for the claim that our figures are valid -- with unimportant variations -- for all those whose names are included in *American Men of Science*, i. e., for practically every American who may at all properly be called a scientist.**

If, in the case of the scientists, we may take the statistics of 1000 as representative of 5500, we may *a fortiori* accept the other statistics as representing the whole of each group, since in each the proportion upon which the investigation bears is larger than in the case of the scientists. While for these the proportion is only 17 per cent., for the historians, it is 54 per cent.; for the sociologists, 34 per cent.; and for the psychologists, 56 per cent.

The representative nature of our statistics invests them with a very great significance, for if these groups of men do not include all the intellectual leaders of the United States, they certainly include the great majority of them. The expression "intellectual leader" should not by any means be construed as a disclaimer of the importance of the moral influence exerted by these men. Most of them are teachers in schools of higher learning. In that capacity they should be, and doubtless are, in a very real sense, moral leaders. There is no class of men who, on the whole, rival them for the influence exerted upon the educated public and upon the young men from whom are to come most of the leaders of the next generation.

What, then, is the main outcome of this research? Chart XI (Partial Summary of Results) shows that in every class of persons investigated, the number of believers in God is less, and in most classes very much less than the number of non-believers, and that the number of believers in immortality is somewhat larger than in a personal God; that among the more distinguished, unbelief is very much more frequent than among the less distinguished; and finally that not only the degree of ability, but also the kind of knowledge possessed, is significantly related to the rejection of these beliefs.

The correlation shown, without exception, in every one of our groups between eminence and disbelief appears to me of momentous significance. In three of these groups (biologists, historians, and psychologists) the number of believers among the men of greater distinction is only half, or less than half the number of believers among the less distinguished men. I do not see any way to avoid the conclusion that disbelief in a personal God and in personal immortality is directly proportional to abilities making for success in the sciences in question. What these abilities are, we shall see in the following chapter.

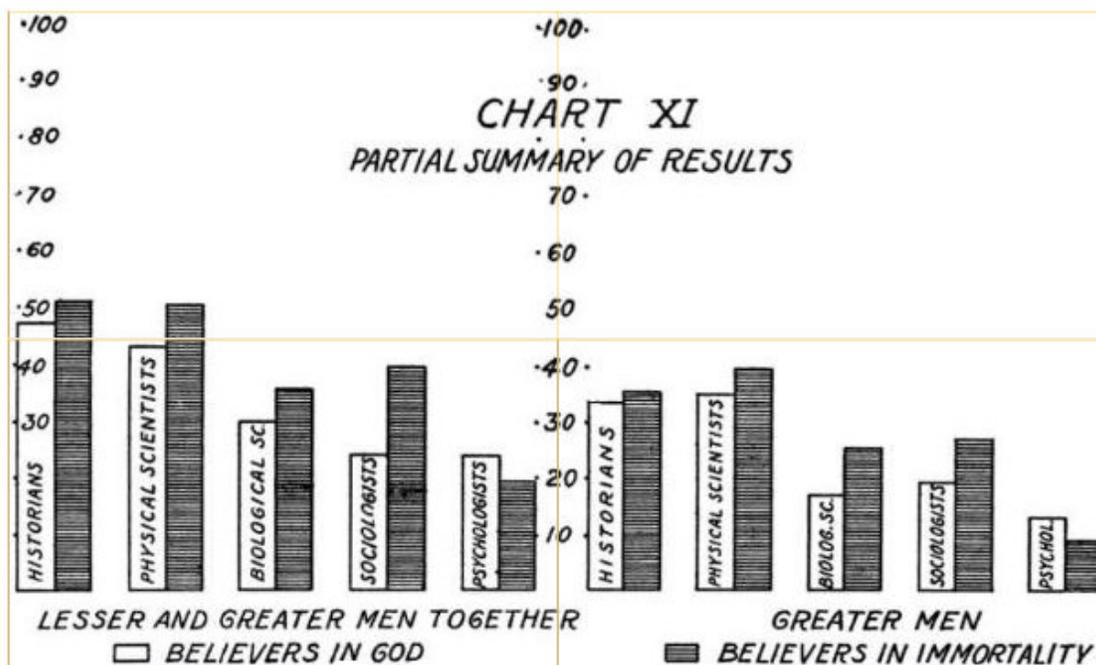
A study of the charts, with regard to the kind of knowledge which favors disbelief shows that the historians and the physical scientists provide the greater; and the psychologists, the sociologists and the biologists, the smaller number of believers. The explanation I have offered is that psychologists, sociologists, and biologists in very large numbers have come to recognize fixed orderliness in organic and psychic life, and not merely in inorganic existence; while frequently physical scientists have recognized the presence of invariable law in the inorganic world only. The belief in a personal God as defined for the purpose of our investigation is, therefore, less often possible to students of psychic and of organic life than to physical scientists.

The place occupied by the historians next to the physical scientists would indicate that for the present the reign of law is not so clearly revealed in the events with which history deals as in biology, economics, and psychology. A large number of historians continue to see the hand of God in human affairs. The influence, destructive of Christian beliefs, attributed in this interpretation to more intimate knowledge of organic and psychic life, appears incontrovertibly, as far as psychic life is concerned, in the remarkable fact that whereas in

every other group the number of believers in immortality is greater than that in God, among the psychologists the reverse is true; the number of believers in immortality among the greater psychologists sinks to 8.8 per cent. One may affirm it seems that, in general, the greater the ability of the psychologist, the more difficult it becomes for him to believe in the continuation of individual life after bodily death.

The students' statistics show that young people enter college possessed of the beliefs still accepted, more or less perfunctorily, in the average home of the land, and that as their mental powers mature and their horizon widens, a large percentage of them abandon the cardinal Christian beliefs. It seems probable that on leaving college, from 40 to 45 per cent. of the students with whom we are concerned deny or doubt the fundamental dogmas of the Christian religion. The marked decrease in belief that takes place during the later adolescent years, in those who spend those years in study under the influence of persons of high culture, is a portentous indication of the fate which, according to our statistics, increased knowledge and the possession of certain capacities leading to eminence reserve to the beliefs in a personal God and in personal immortality.

The situation revealed by the present statistical studies demands a revision of public opinion regarding the prevalence and the future of the two cardinal beliefs of official Christianity; and shows the futility of the efforts of those who would meet the present religious crisis by devising a more efficient organization and cooperation of the churches, or more attractive social features, or even a more complete consecration of the church membership to its task. The essential problem facing organized Christianity is constituted by the wide-spread rejection of its two fundamental dogmas -- a rejection apparently destined to extend parallel with the diffusion of knowledge and the moral qualities that make for eminence in scholarly pursuits.



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