

Predicting behaviour from beliefs - summary

Dr Carissa and her colleagues asked whether the answers someone gave to the question 'What do you think God is like?' would help predict what kinds of beliefs and attitudes that person might have.

What do you think?

If someone thinks God is ...	boundless and infinite (Limitless)	... how might they behave?
	strict and punishing (Authoritarian)	
	cosmic energy (Mystical)	
	forgiving and compassionate (Benevolent)	
	unimaginable and incomprehensible (Ineffable)	

Dr Carissa's research showed that:

If someone thinks God is ...	boundless and infinite (Limitless)	... they are likely to appreciate religious diversity, and to focus on individual spirituality rather than groups. They are less likely to feel close to nature or to believe in reincarnation.
	strict and punishing (Authoritarian)	... they are likely to see God as a personal being and quite likely to be committed to following God. They are less likely to feel close to nature.
	cosmic energy (Mystical)	... they are likely to feel close to nature. They are likely to believe God is involved in human affairs, even though they see God as more of a cosmic force than a personal being. They are more likely to believe in reincarnation.
	forgiving and compassionate (Benevolent)	... they are most likely to see God as a personal being who is involved in people's lives. They are most likely to be committed to following God, and also believe that their beliefs contain fundamental truths.
	unimaginable and incomprehensible (Ineffable)	... they are unlikely to be certain about what God is like, but they are very likely to ask lots of questions about God and spirituality.

- Which of these findings match your predictions?
- Why do you think people with these ideas of God behave in this way?
- How far do your own ideas about God's (non-)existence affect your behaviour and attitudes?