

Post Critical Belief Scale

The Post Critical Belief Scale maps the presence of (and the relationship between) four attitudes towards religion in an individual or a population as a whole. These attitudes towards religion are 'idealised types' or theoretically 'pure' positions. They are not personality types and they are not mutually exclusive. One person may display a mixture of belief styles or attitudes at any one time. The four possible attitudes towards religion stem from two key positions: Belief (or non belief) in a transcendent God and literal or symbolic ways of thinking about religious content. Around these axes (belief – non-belief; literal-symbolic) four approaches to religion are identified; Literal Belief; External Critique (literal non-belief); Relativism and Post-Critical Belief.

Literal Belief

This style or type entails belief in a transcendent God in a literal way. It stresses the objectivity of belief in God. For this style or type Bible texts are read literally, like reading a newspaper report. In this type critical reflection about faith is seen as risky and a threat to religious certainty. This belief style can be intolerant towards alternative religious positions and, in the extreme, can become religious fundamentalism or fanaticism.

External Critique (literal non-belief)

An External Critic rejects belief in a transcendent reality. Religious language, statements are taken literally and dismissed as rationally indefensible (e.g. The theory of evolution proves the world was not created in seven days.) The External Critic may see belief as a form of dependence or weakness and, in the extreme, it may become anti-religious intolerance or fundamentalism. External critique may also be a 'stage' in development or growth from literal to symbolic belief.

Relativism

This 'type' of religious attitude (unlike External Critique) approaches matters of religion in a symbolic way and (like External Critique) excludes belief in a transcendent God. For the relativist religions are merely interchangeable options and, often, the relativist reduces religions to human constructs. Sometimes this attitude or type is a way of remaining uncommitted, of keeping options open or refusing to engage. In the extreme this can be a position of indifference or meaninglessness.

Second Naiveté (post-critical belief)

Second Naiveté or Post Critical Belief (like Literal Belief) is characterised by belief in a transcendent God while being aware of the many critiques of religion and belief. Second Naiveté belief, at the same time, recognises that God is mystery, never completely containable by our limited human language. Second Naiveté belief is an attitude of wonder and quest recognising that the relationship with God is mediated sacramentally in the context of a faith community. Second Naiveté belief is a fragile position. At its best it is regarded as the most mature form of faith, while in the extreme it can become a vague 'religious' attitude without a clear point of reference open to any interpretation.