

# A Comparative Study of the Substructures of Religion\*

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This study starts from the premise that religions, in all their diversity, rest upon a common structure—the persistent experience of injustice, suffering, and meaninglessness. The research deals with the responses made by 751 persons from five countries to statements suggesting those themes. Three general hypotheses are tested: 1) that interest in questions of injustice, suffering, and meaninglessness would be widespread among this heterogeneous set of respondents; 2) that the problems would be seen as persistent and intractable, 3) that the belief would prevail, nevertheless, that the problems could finally be dealt with, despite the testimony of experience. Each of these hypotheses of six predictor variables was upheld. In addition, several specific hypotheses make predictions regarding the influence of these interests and beliefs, country of citizenship, father's occupation, religious identity, sex, level of education, and major subject of study, with country, religious identity, and education producing some effects

**T**wo major traditions prevail in the scientific study of religion. One emphasizes the obvious differences in rite, belief, and social organization among religions. Historical, cultural, and structural sources of these differences are examined; their consequences for individuals, societies, and social change are explored. In the other tradition, religion, rather than separate religions, is the object of study. Since superempirical systems of belief and rite are found nearly everywhere, if not universally, it seems reasonable to suppose that they are related to experiences that are humanwide, resting upon some common substructure. Thus, despite the vast differences among the religions of the world, one who examines them from this perspective has no difficulty in seeing them as somehow alike. They fit into the human enterprise in similar ways. If that is true, much can be learned about religion and about life generally by trying to identify the parameters of the substructure and measuring its properties.

These two traditions are not mutually exclusive. Indeed they are complementary, and many scholars participate in both, despite some contradictory assumptions. They differ significantly in methodology, however, and failure to recognize the contrasts between them weakens their potential contributions to a

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science of religion. In a biological counterpart, one can study the causes and consequences of differentiation among species, or one can study similarities within a highly variant class or even phylum. Analogous contrasts are found in linguistics, in studies of every major institution, and in personality theory. In most instances, the more idiographic approach has come first, with comparative and abstract work following, and to some degree resting upon, the descriptive studies. Thus ethnography precedes ethnology, descriptive linguistics precedes structural linguistics, and, to put the issue in its most general form, natural history precedes natural science. The data reported here are studied in the second tradition. Years of research, study, and reflection have led me to the belief that religion rests upon the persistent experience of suffering, injustice, and meaninglessness. These experiences are widely recognized as the roots of religion. Clifford Geertz (1966: 14) expresses the issue clearly:

There are at least three points where chaos—a tumult of events which lack not just interpretations but *interpretability*—threatens to break in upon man: at the limits of his analytic capacities, at the limits of his powers of endurance, and at the limits of his moral insight. Bafflement, suffering, and a sense of intractable ethical paradox are all, if they become intense enough or are sustained long enough, radical challenges to the proposition that life is comprehensible and that we can, by taking thought, orient ourselves effectively within it—challenges with which any religion, however “primitive,” which hopes to persist must attempt somehow to cope

This is perhaps too intellectualistic a way of putting it. We take not only thought but action—ritual action—in the effort to cope with these threatening experiences. We seek not only interpretability but the ability to handle those experiences emotionally. One might define religion as the final word and the final action by which an individual or a society seeks to deal with the threat of suffering, meaninglessness, and injustice. It is not, of course, the only word or action. Most of what we do can be interpreted as efforts to cope with these experiences or to negate them (see O’Dea, 1970: 202-209; Yinger, 1970: 79-81). Our secular efforts often fail, however. We are acutely aware today that technically advanced societies are not demonstrably superior to the less advanced in their capacity to attain meaning and to reduce suffering and injustice.

If this approach to religion is useful, we should find these three beliefs among the adults in any society, whatever the rites and doctrines to which they adhere: 1) a widespread interest in problems of meaninglessness, suffering, and injustice; 2) a sense that these are persistent and intractable problems; 3) and yet a conviction that, despite their enduring quality, these problems can finally be dealt with—the chaos pushed back—by our beliefs and actions. In this paper, I seek to begin to explore empirically the distribution of such beliefs and to examine some of the variables that account for their different combinations.

These beliefs do not immediately indicate how religion differs from all the other activities concerned with injustice, suffering, and meaninglessness. The problem of definition is particularly great for those who see religion as a sharply separate category of human experience. If religion is seen adjectively (as John Dewey suggested), as a variable, as a quality of experience that can infuse many activities, one looks not for boundaries but for measures of the intensity of relevant experiences.

From this we can extend our definition of religion. It is the set of beliefs and practices by which a group:

- 1) designates its deepest problems of meaning, suffering, and injustice;
- 2) specifies its most fundamental ways of trying to reduce those problems (these shade off into and are complementary with secular ways);
- 3) and seeks to deal with the fact that, in spite of all, meaninglessness, suffering, and injustice continue.

The third criterion is the definitive one. It helps to distinguish religion from philosophy, which also seeks to comprehend these fundamental aspects of experience, to discover their essential nature. Religion is, in addition, a course of action that rests, in the last analysis, on a superempirical system of faith. Religion struggles with the *failure* of the human enterprise at its most critical points. Setting aside the "facts", it affirms, in one form or another, a remedy for the human condition that is "beyond tragedy."

This study is a preliminary effort to isolate, by empirical means, the substructures upon which religion rests—that is, to measure the elements shared by religions. I seek also to investigate the pattern of distribution of those elements, to discover which parts of those substructures are most important to different persons. Many variables doubtless influence the distribution. From the vast array of research on religion, one is led quickly to the investigation of national culture and experience, religious tradition, social class, sex, and educational level as critical influences (see, e.g., Allport, 1950; Fortes, 1959; McFarland, 1967; Niebuhr, 1929; Weber, 1963; Yang, 1961; Yinger, 1970). To these I added major subject of study, hypothesizing that occupational subcultures might be important. To keep the inquiry within bounds, both for the respondents and for the investigator, other potentially important variables were not included: Personality differences, regional and ethnic variation within nations, and age, for example, are likely to be significantly related to the values and attitudes being studied. They need to be included in further work, if the line of investigation reported here proves to be fruitful.

Even the variables selected for study have, in some cases, been "measured" only crudely. Father's occupation is a rough indicator of social class; only a small part of the range of an education variable is represented; and the strength of the expressed religious identities is unknown. It is clear that I have not deprived myself, or possibly others, of opportunities for extensive improvement of research on this topic (for one study, see Nelson *et al.*, 1976).

## METHODS

### *Respondents*

This analysis is based primarily on materials from 751 college and university students in Japan, Korea, Thailand, New Zealand, and Australia in 1971 and 1972. For some tabulations, an additional 124 respondents, from 11 different countries, were added. Since each of these national groups was small and since the data were

obtained at two different times while the respondents were in residence at an American research center rather than in their home universities, direct comparisons with the basic group of 751 were not undertaken. Another group of 151 students from an American college answered questions on an earlier and shorter version of the questionnaire. Because they were not asked to furnish information on most of the predictor variables, their responses will only be included in some of the general tabulations, not in the multivariate analysis. Only the American group is a sample in any formal sense, and they are a sample only of their own campus. Our findings cannot be generalized to the university students in the nations involved or even to the campuses on which the material was obtained.

Table 1 gives an overview of the respondents in terms of country, religious preference, occupation of fathers of respondents, and academic majors. Although there are substantial numbers of Buddhists, Protestants, and Catholics among the respondents, the largest percentage recorded no religious preference. This was most often the choice of students from Japan and Korea and to a lesser degree from Thailand. About half of the "free thinker" group had parents of similar views, as reported by the students. Most of the rest came from Protestant or Buddhist backgrounds.

TABLE 1

## CHARACTERISTICS OF RESPONDENTS

Countries of Citizenship <sup>a</sup>			Religious Preferences <sup>b</sup>			Occupation of Fathers of Respondents <sup>c</sup>			Academic Majors <sup>c</sup>		
Countries	%	N	Religion	%	N	Category	%	N	Subjects of major study	%	N
Japan	16.6	145	Buddhist	19.2	176	Professional	12.5	100	Psychology or social science	31.1	255
Korea	17.0	149	Hindu	1.5	14	Govt or military off	4.6	37	Business	9.4	77
Taiwan	0.9	8	Jewish	1.5	14	Official in large firm	1.8	14	Humanities	17.0	139
Thailand	17.6	154	Muslim	2.8	26	Owner or manager of small firm	33.9	271	Education, library science, social work	19.5	160
New Zealand	28.6	250	Protestant	31.0	284	White collar worker	23.4	187	Physical or biological science	9.4	77
United States	3.5	31	Roman Catholic	11.1	102	Skilled worker	5.1	41	Medicine	1.7	14
Australia	6.1	53	Free thinker, agnostic, atheist, or none	30.2	277	Semi skilled or unskilled worker	4.8	38	Applied science	4.9	40
Malaysia	2.1	18	Other	2.6	24	Farmer or fisherman	11.0	88	Agriculture, agricultural and home economics	2.8	23
Indonesia	0.6	5			Other	2.9	23	Other	4.2	34	
Pakistan	0.8	7									
Philippines	1.3	11									
India	1.9	17									
United Kingdom	1.6	14									
Other	1.5	13									

<sup>a</sup> When citizenship was used as a variable, only those countries with over 50 respondents were used. The 151 American students who answered a short version of the questionnaire were not included in this tabulation.

<sup>b</sup> When religious preference was used as a variable, only those categories with over 100 respondents were considered.

<sup>c</sup> The American sample is not included in this tabulation.

Occupation of father can be used as a rough index of social class. Although the range of backgrounds is quite wide, middle and upper classes are undoubtedly more heavily represented than in the populations from which the respondents were drawn.

Although samples were drawn from a variety of courses, including physical science, literature, education, social science, and psychology, the latter two are

somewhat over-represented. Since we are interested primarily, however, in the study of the relationship of responses to statements dealing with the hypothesized three religious roots and a series of predictor variables (citizenship, religious identity, educational level, social class, college major, and sex), sampling questions are not, at this stage, of fundamental concern.

Men and women were about equally represented in the total group (501 men, 519 women) and in the separate national samples. Fifty-eight per cent of the respondents were underclassmen, 25 per cent were upperclassmen, and 18 per cent were graduate students, with most of them falling within the age range 17-25.

### *Questionnaire*

To test the hypotheses, a questionnaire was given in the language of the country involved and administered by professors from each country in cooperation with the author. (Students at the American research center, all of whom were studying in English, filled out the English version of the questionnaire.) I will not explore here the hazards of using an instrument that has been translated into several languages (from English into Japanese, Korean, and Thai). Perhaps the only thing more risky in research than such translations is the failure to attempt to use them—with the serious losses thus entailed for comparative study. To reduce the difficulties, I went through each version with the translators, asking them to read each statement back into English and then to comment on any choice of word or phrase that seemed problematic. We talked about possible alternative ways of expressing an idea and about choices between words. Fortunately, after the questionnaires had been given, a Korean professor of philosophy, trained in schools where Japanese was the required language and also fluent in English, examined the Japanese, Korean, and English versions of the instrument, and found them to be highly comparable. Nevertheless, problems of reliability certainly remain that a person who knew the languages involved might have reduced further. (On problems of translation, see, for example, Ervin & Bower, 1952-53; Nida, 1945; Phillips, 1959-60; Anderson, 1973; and Deutscher, 1973.)

In addition to the request for information regarding the respondents' nationality, religious preference, major, sex, father's occupation, and academic level—a request that appeared on the last page—most of the questionnaire was made up of 26 statements that required simply a check indicating degree of agreement or disagreement. Almost no questions were raised about this procedure and the completion rate was high.

Answers to the one open-ended question ranged from a phrase to a paragraph; only 21 of the total sample of 1026 failed to respond to this question. Statements of the Japanese, Korean, and Thai respondents were translated into English by professors and advanced graduate students, all native speakers, and the coding was done from the English by graduate assistants of the author. No formal check was made on the reliability of the coding after we found over 85 per cent agreement between codings made by the author and a graduate student and between two graduate students on the first fifty answers. The coders were blind as to the purpose of the study. They were aware of the nationality of respondents being coded, because translations were made

directly on the questionnaires. Since I had not discussed hypotheses with them, however, this information is not likely to have had a systematic effect on the coding.

## RESULTS

### *Substructures of Religion*

Before developing a multivariate analysis that indicates the comparative importance of the independent variables for these attitudes and values, we can profitably examine the range of responses to the statements and questions and a few zero order relationships. The questionnaire was labelled "a comparative study of attitudes," not a study of religion. In fact, the word religion was seldom used in the questions, and was studiously avoided in the first half of the questionnaire. After a brief introductory and explanatory statement, the following question appeared: "What do you consider the one most fundamental or important issue for the human race; that is, what do you see as the basic and permanent question for mankind, the question of which all others are only parts?" The range of responses is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2  
REFERENCES TO MEANINGLESSNESS,  
SUFFERING, AND INJUSTICE IN RESPONSE TO OPEN-ENDED QUESTION  
ON THE BASIC AND PERMANENT QUESTION FOR MANKIND

Basic Theme of the Answer	%	N
Meaning - meaninglessness	28.8	289
Suffering and its removal	20.7	208
Meaning, suffering, and injustice all mentioned	20.5	206
Injustice and suffering	7.4	74
Meaning and suffering	5.4	54
Meaning and injustice	5.0	50
Justice - injustice	4.6	46
Religion specifically mentioned	3.2	32
Morality, character	2.2	22
Education, knowledge	1.0	10
Sex or family life	0.8	8
Other	0.6	6

Only eight per cent failed to refer to themes of meaning or meaninglessness, suffering and its reduction, or justice-injustice when asked to indicate the basic and permanent question for mankind. Many respondents mentioned two or all three of these themes, with 60 per cent noting questions of meaning, 54 per cent problems of suffering and 38 per cent issues of injustice in their answers. These are, as I see them, the roots of religion. And seen separately, they help to account for the different forms in which religious activity is expressed: Concern for meaning is the impulse to mystical belief and action; concern for suffering, when deeply felt, is the source of asceticism; and concern for injustice is the major force in prophetic movements.

Among most persons, I would hypothesize, these concerns are of relatively low saliency and tend to be combined. Major religious traditions involve beliefs and rites that refer to all three, although in varying amounts. When, for reasons of personal biography or widely shared experience, one of these issues assumes unusual importance, conditions are ripe for a sectarian movement that highlights problems of meaning, or suffering, or injustice.

Although the three themes appeared among all segments of the group being studied, they were not distributed in equivalent patterns. Buddhist respondents, both male and female, were more likely to select suffering as the basic question than respondents who identified with other religious traditions; and they were less likely to select problems of meaning and injustice. We will not develop this first order relationship, however, because it does not permit the isolation of the effect of religion from the effects of other variables, particularly citizenship. We shall see below that the influences associated with national identity are stronger than those associated with religious identity, even on questions related to these primordial religious themes.

When our respondents were asked to express their agreement or disagreement with a series of statements on these same themes, similar patterns appear. In Table 3 these statements are grouped into five categories, with questions related to meaning, suffering, injustice, religion generally, and politics separated from one another, rather than being randomly distributed, as they were in the questionnaire. In this way, the range of answers to the various themes may be seen more readily.

There are many themes, not always compatible, in these patterns of response; but perhaps they can be summarized. A modal response for each of the five sets of statements might read:

I. I am very interested in questions of meaning; I often wonder what life is about. Though the basic meaning is beyond our understanding, there is an order that someday we will come to understand.

II. Types of human suffering may have changed, but suffering has not been reduced. Nevertheless the reduction of suffering on earth is a critically important question.

III. Types of injustice may have changed, but injustice has not been reduced. Nevertheless the reduction of injustice on earth is a critically important question.

IV. Mankind's most difficult experiences can be a source of strength; their significance can be shaped by our beliefs. It is not clear that mankind can control his tendency toward conflict and violence, yet in the long run undeserving people do not win the most advantages. Religious efforts to deal with our most difficult problems are valuable.

V. It is not clear that we can reduce our most difficult problems by political action.

These responses clearly indicate that among this highly diverse group of respondents, most of whom identify with a religious tradition but few of whom are members of religious organizations, concern for questions of meaning, suffering, and injustice run high. They see these as "permanent" aspects of the human condition and yet, paradoxically, as somehow subject to final control. This last belief does not rest on their empirical judgments, which tend to be pessimistic, but on super-

**TABLE 3**  
**RESPONSES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO STATEMENTS CONCERNING**  
**MEANING, SUFFERING, INJUSTICE, RELIGION, AND POLITICS**  
**Percentages by Responses**

Item		1 Fully agree	2 Partly agree	3 Uncer- tain	4 Partly disagree	5 Fully disagree	Mean	N
I	1 I am not very interested in discussion of the question of the meaning or meaninglessness of life	6.2%	12.2	2.4	18.0	61.2	4.16	1025
	2 Despite the often chaotic conditions of human life, I believe there is an order and pattern to existence that someday we will come to understand	28.5	31.3	12.7	12.6	14.8	2.54	1020
	3 I often wonder what life is all about	49.9	33.9	2.0	7.4	6.8	1.87	841
	4 Although mankind understands the world around him better, the basic meaning of life is beyond our understanding	31.1	28.0	4.9	20.8	15.3	2.61	843
II	5 In recent generations, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of human suffering	4.3	17.4	4.7	20.8	52.8	4.01	846
	6 It is a mistake to believe that the reduction of suffering on earth is the critically important question for mankind	11.2	19.3	2.7	23.2	43.6	3.69	846
	7 The types of human suffering may have changed, and continue to change, but mankind is not likely to reduce the extent of suffering	30.8	33.7	5.4	19.8	10.3	2.45	845
	8 In recent generations, suffering has increased in the world	24.1	30.1	17.3	19.5	9.0	2.59	843
III	9 The types of injustice may have changed, and may continue to change, but mankind is not likely to reduce the extent of injustice	38.8	33.1	5.8	16.3	6.0	2.18	848
	10 In recent generations injustice has increased in the world	24.1	26.7	18.4	19.7	11.2	2.67	848
	11 In recent generations there has been a significant reduction in the amount of injustice in human life	2.6	14.4	14.3	28.9	39.8	3.89	845



**TABLE 3 (CONTINUED)**  
**RESPONSES OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TO STATEMENTS CONCERNING**  
**MEANING, SUFFERING, INJUSTICE, RELIGION, AND POLITICS**  
**Percentages by Responses**

Item	1 Fully agree	2 Partly agree	3 Uncer- tain	4 Partly disagree	5 Fully disagree	Mean	N
12 It is a mistake to believe that the reduction of injustice on earth is the critically important question for mankind	9.8	21.7	4.0	27.7	36.9	3.60	835
IV 13 Mankind's most difficult and destructive experiences are often the source of increased understanding and powers of endurance	32.8	46.3	4.4	10.4	6.1	2.11	1016
14 In the long run, undeserving persons often seem to be the ones who win the most advantages	9.0	29.5	8.3	27.8	25.4	3.31	842
15 In the face of the almost continuous conflict and violence in life, I cannot see how men are going to learn to live in mutual respect and peace with one another	15.9	29.1	4.7	25.9	24.5	3.14	1025
16 Suffering, injustice, and finally death need not be negative experiences, their significance can be shaped by our beliefs	41.7	37.1	5.8	8.5	7.0	2.02	1020
17 Efforts to deal with man's most difficult problems by religious means seems to me to be a waste of time and resources	11.6	21.8	5.5	34.9	26.2	3.42	889
18 There are many aspects of the beliefs and practices of the world's religions with which I might not agree, nevertheless I consider them to be valuable efforts to deal with man's most important questions	37.8	37.5	5.0	11.4	8.3	2.15	887
V 19 Efforts to deal with man's most difficult problems by political means seem to me to be a waste of time and resources	15.9	30.3	4.9	29.3	19.7	3.07	844
20 In the long run, mankind will be able to reduce injustice and suffering by wise political action	7.6	36.3	9.3	23.3	23.5	3.19	840

empirical views that seem to refer to a hidden reality beyond what they have observed.

This last point can be emphasized by reporting responses to a subset of the statements that clearly refer less to empirical judgments than to projections about the long-range meaning of often destructive experiences. Fortunately for this purpose we could add further respondents. Seven of the twenty statements in Table 3 were part of an earlier version of the questionnaire that was given to random samples of the student bodies of ten middle western colleges, to a group of freshman in a Dutch university, and to students in two secondary schools in Britain (a majority

TABLE 4  
COMPARISONS OF FOUR SETS OF SAMPLES ON  
NON-DOCTRINAL RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES<sup>a</sup>

Item		Samples <sup>b</sup>			
		A	B	C	D
1. Suffering, injustice, and finally death are the lot of man; but they need not be negative experiences; their significance and effects can be shaped by our beliefs.	Mean <sup>c</sup>	2.01	2.09	2.74	2.16
	% "religious" <sup>d</sup>	84	81	64	85
2. In face of the almost continuous conflict and violence in life, I cannot see how men are going to learn to live in mutual respect and peace with one another	Mean	3.14	3.10	3.64	2.24
	% "religious"	53	51	70	26
3. Somehow, I cannot get very interested in the talk about "the basic human conditions" and "man's ultimate problems" <sup>e</sup>	Mean	4.15	3.84	4.28	3.48
	% "religious"	81	72	88	67
4. Mankind's most difficult and destructive experiences are often the source of increased understanding and powers of endurance.	Mean	2.09	2.03	2.04	1.93
	% "religious"	82	83	84	85
5. Despite the often chaotic conditions of human life, I believe that there is order and pattern to existence that someday we'll come to understand	Mean	2.50	2.52	2.06	1.71
	% "religious"	68	68	82	90
Mean % "religious"		74	71	78	71

a Two questions which contained the world religion have been omitted from this tabulation.

b Identification of the samples

A= 1026 college and university students in Japan, Korea, Thailand, New Zealand, Australia, and the United States, 1971-1972

B= 1325 undergraduates from ten midwestern colleges, 1968

C= 159 university freshman in the Netherlands, 1969, data courtesy of Peter Swanborn and Morton King

D= 117 secondary school students in England, 1973, data courtesy of John Marvell.

c The range is from 1 (fully agree) to 5 (fully disagree) On statements 1, 4, and 5 a low score (below 3) equals a religious answer, on statements 2 and 3 a high score (above 3) is religious

d The uncertain category has been eliminated from this calculation.

e The form of question 3 was somewhat different for Sample A

of whom were immigrants from Greece, Turkey, India, and the West Indies). Several of these statements relate to what we can call “cosmic optimism”—a belief that in spite of all difficulties, perhaps even because of them, man’s final condition is meaningful and positive. Comparison of the responses to these statements helps establish the boundaries in this attitude domain, even though we do not have information from the earlier samples on social class, majors, or other variables that would permit analysis of the sources of similarities and differences.

Nearly three-fourths of the responses to the statements in Table 4, among all four sets of respondents, were in the “religious” direction. They expressed the belief that day-by-day experience is not entirely what it seems, that behind the difficulties and the disorder there is another kind of reality that supercedes or redefines experience. These beliefs as expressed here in responses to the statements in Table 4 had no association with any particular religion; they are non-doctrinal. Not only were they about equally frequent among adherents to the major religious traditions, but also among those who professed no religious identity. As reported in the multivariate analysis below, in fact, religious identity accounted for only a small part of the variance in response to these non-doctrinal statements. These data lend empirical support to Gerald Weiss’ (1974: 381) recent observation:

“Religious behavior” is behavior of an unusual sort. . . . It presupposes the existence in every culture of a cosmology—a set of ideas about the universe—which invariably includes ideas about a hidden reality existing behind the world of appearances. The world of appearances is not self-explanatory, and human beings in every culture have posited a hidden reality in terms of which the world of appearances makes some kind of sense.

In my view, this cosmology is not necessarily supernatural, but it is superempirical. It goes beyond experience in an attempt to lend a coherence to life that it would otherwise lack. This process is weak only with regard to statement 2 in Table 4, with its direct reference to conflict and violence. Even there, three out of four of the groups, with over 95 per cent of the respondents, had mean scores above the middle of the scale.

To obtain additional measures of the respondents’ perceptions of injustice, suffering, and meaninglessness, I asked the 875 who took the longer form of the questionnaire to place a check at what they considered the appropriate places on the scales shown in Table 5.

Mean scores on scales one and two, and perhaps even more clearly the median scores, indicate the predominant belief that there is a great deal of injustice and suffering in the world. These results correspond with what one might expect from Table 3. The score on perceived meaninglessness, however, was much lower, falling below the midpoint of the scale. Despite the perceptions of high levels of injustice and suffering, the prevailing belief is that life is meaningful for most people.

When the respondents applied these scales to themselves, all three scores dropped significantly, indicating a belief that they themselves had experienced much less injustice and suffering and had a stronger sense of meaningfulness in life than is generally true. The difference between the mean of the scores on scale one and the mean on the matching individual scale (number 4) was many times the standard error. Scales 2-5 and 3-6 were similarly distinguished. The two sets of scales clearly measure perceptions of distinctive facts. It is also important to note that on the scales

**TABLE 5**  
**MEASURES OF IDEAL AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCE ON**  
**SCALES OF INJUSTICE, SUFFERING, AND MEANINGLESSNESS**

Item	Mean	Median	SD	N
<i>Compared with my ideal, with the situation I wish were true, I believe that in the world:</i>				
1 There is very little injustice . . . . . 7 There is a great deal or injustice	5.43	5.69	1.40	842
1 There is very little suffering . . . . . 7 There is a great deal of suffering	5.51	5.75	1.37	845
1. Life is meaningful for most people . . . . . 7 Life is meaningless for most people	3.60	3.70	1.73	841
<i>Compared with most other people in your country, what has been your own personal experience?</i>				
1 I have experienced very little injustice . . . . . 7 I have experienced a great deal of injustice	3.11	2.79	1.70	844
1 I have experienced very little suffering . . . . . 7 I have experienced a great deal of suffering	3.26	3.04	1.77	842
1. I have a strong sense of meaningfulness in life . . . . . 7 I have a strong sense of meaninglessness in life	2.73	2.44	1.50	843

indicating the respondents experiences, the sense of meaningfulness outweighed the sense of having experienced injustice and suffering. Standard deviations for all of the scales were quite large, however, suggesting the need to examine the factors that produce the variations.

#### *Influence of the Predictor Variables*

It is useful to plot the value-attitude domain among our respondents viewed as a whole. Since there was substantial variations, however, it was also necessary to examine the relationships between the several predictor variables and the responses to the statements in the questionnaire. I hypothesized that religious identity would be only a moderately significant predictor, on the assumption that we were measuring substructures that undergirded all religions—and indeed the life views of those who professed no religious identity. National cultures and experiences, on the other hand, seemed to be likely to influence more strongly the responses to statements dealing with injustice, suffering, and meaninglessness. Knowing that a person was Japanese or Thai, I hypothesized, would be of greater value in predicting

responses than knowing that he or she was a Buddhist or a Protestant or professed no religion, both because many experiences influencing these responses were shared by members of a nation, not specifically by members of a religious group, and because many norms and values—the building blocks of culture—are sustained by national institutions rather than by separate religious institutions. I predicted further that men and women would be significantly different in many of their attitudes. In addition it was hypothesized that students from higher social classes, as indexed by father's occupation, would be more concerned over questions of meaning, while those from lower social classes would be more concerned over questions of injustice and suffering. I formulated no specific hypotheses regarding

TABLE 6  
SIGNIFICANCE OF GROSS EFFECTS OF SIX PREDICTOR VARIABLES  
ON RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS CONCERNING MEANING,  
SUFFERING, INJUSTICE, RELIGION, AND POLITICS

Dependent Variables	N	Predictor Variables					Father's occupation	Religion
		Level of education	Major subject	Sex	Citizen-ship			
<b>I Meaning</b>								
1 (Table 3)	569	.01	n.s.	01	.001	n.s.	.01	
2 (Table 3)	516	n.s.	.05	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	
3 (Table 3)	563	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
4 (Table 3)	551	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	
3. (Table 5)	579	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
6 (Table 5)	579	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
<b>II Suffering</b>								
5 (Table 3)	549	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.01	
6 (Table 3)	566	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.	
7. (Table 3)	542	.05	.001	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.	
8. (Table 3)	480	n.s.	.05	n.s.	.001	.05	n.s.	
2 (Table 5)	579	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
5 (Table 5)	579	n.s.	.01	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.05	
<b>III Injustice</b>								
9 (Table 3)	545	n.s.	.05	.05	.001	.01	.001	
10 (Table 3)	468	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	.05	.001	
11 (Table 3)	497	.05	.05	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.05	
12 (Table 3)	552	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.	
1 (Table 5)	574	n.s.	.05	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	
4 (Table 5)	579	n.s.	.05	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.01	
<b>IV Religion</b>								
13. (Table 3)	550	.001	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.	
14 (Table 3)	529	.05	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	
15 (Table 3)	553	.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
16 (Table 3)	546	n.s.	n.s.	.01	n.s.	n.s.	.05	
17 (Table 3)	544	n.s.	.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	
18 (Table 3)	546	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001	
<b>V. Politics</b>								
19. (Table 3)	553	n.s.	.01	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.	
20. (Table 3)	524	n.s.	n.s.	.01	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	
No of significant predictions		6	12	4	18	3	14	

the possible relationships of level of education and major subject of study to variation in the responses, although these variables were also included in the analyses.

These generalized statements can be made more meaningful by examining each of the statements in Tables 3 and 5. From a multiple regression analysis (using MCA) we can calculate the probability that differences, within each predictor variable, were significant, using both gross and net F tests. It is useful to compare the results of the F (gross) test which takes no account of other variables with those of the F (net) test which controls for the other predictors. The presence of clear differences between the two tests would indicate multiple effects hidden by any simple correlation. (For a valuable examination of ways to deal with interaction effects, see Gorsuch, 1973). Since the MCA requires information on all six variables, Ns were somewhat reduced for these calculations.

Table 6 indicates that 57 out of 156 relationships (37%) were significant by the F (gross) test at the .05 level or better. As predicted, citizenship was the most influential variable, followed by religious identity and, unexpectedly, major subject. The prediction that men and women would vary significantly was upheld in only four instances out of 26.

The relationships reported in Table 6 between the dependent variables and each of the predictor variables may be distorted by the unmeasured effects of other predictor variables, which can either enhance or reduce the measure of gross relationships. We need to ask, therefore, what happens to a relationship when the effects of the other predictor variables are held constant. The results are indicated in Table 7, which reports the F (net) probabilities.

As shown in Table 7, 55 out of 156 relationships (35%) were significant at the .05 level or better by the F (net) test. This is similar to the overall pattern when the gross test was used, but there were interesting internal shifts. When other variables were controlled, citizenship became even more significant as a predictor. Only three of the twenty-six statements were insignificantly affected by country of citizenship. Major subject and father's occupation, on the other hand, dropped sharply as predictors (the latter disappearing entirely). The apparent importance of major subject when measured by the gross test (12 out of 26 measures were significant) was produced by interaction with other variables. When these are controlled, only four significant figures remain for major subject. And one or two would be expected simply by chance.

Level of education proved to be more significant when the effects of other variables were removed, with the number of significant relationships increasing from six to eleven. This variable is no doubt partly an index of age. Sex also increased slightly as a predictor, although it remained, contrary to my expectation, relatively weak.

The influence of religious identity was reduced but continued to be of substantial importance, with 11 of the 26 relationships significant. Four of the significant measures, it should be noted, were from the statements referring directly to religion. Five of the six statements on injustice seemed, by the gross test, to be significantly influenced by religion. But this number fell to two when other variables were controlled.

**TABLE 7**  
**SIGNIFICANCE OF NET EFFECTS OF SIX PREDICTOR VARIABLES**  
**ON RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS CONCERNING MEANING,**  
**SUFFERING, INJUSTICE, RELIGION, AND POLITICS**

Dependent Variables	N	Predictor Variables					
		Level of education	Major subject	Sex	Citizen-ship	Father's occupation	Religion
<b>I. Meaning</b>							
1. (Table 3)	569	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.01	n.s.	n.s.
2. (Table 3)	516	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001
3. (Table 3)	563	.01	n.s.	.05	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
4. (Table 3)	551	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001
3. (Table 5)	579	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.05
6. (Table 5)	579	.001	n.s.	.05	.01	n.s.	n.s.
<b>II. Suffering</b>							
5. (Table 3)	549	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
6. (Table 3)	566	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
7. (Table 3)	542	.05	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
8. (Table 3)	480	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
2. (Table 5)	579	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.05	n.s.	n.s.
5. (Table 5)	579	.01	n.s.	.05	.001	n.s.	.05
<b>III. Injustice</b>							
9. (Table 3)	545	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.01
10. (Table 3)	468	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
11. (Table 3)	497	.05	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
12. (Table 3)	552	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
1. (Table 5)	574	.01	.05	n.s.	.05	n.s.	.01
4. (Table 5)	579	.01	.05	.05	.001	n.s.	n.s.
<b>IV. Religion</b>							
13. (Table 3)	550	.01	.01	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.01
14. (Table 3)	529	.01	n.s.	n.s.	.001	n.s.	n.s.
15. (Table 3)	553	.05	n.s.	n.s.	.05	n.s.	n.s.
16. (Table 3)	546	n.s.	n.s.	.01	n.s.	n.s.	.05
17. (Table 3)	544	.05	.05	n.s.	.001	n.s.	.001
18. (Table 3)	546	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.01	n.s.	.001
<b>V. Politics</b>							
19. (Table 3)	553	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	.01	n.s.	n.s.
12. (Table 3)	524	n.s.	n.s.	.05	.001	n.s.	.05
No. of significant predictions		11	4	6	23	0	11

It is not enough, of course, to say simply that citizenship, religious identity, and level of education were significantly related to the responses to the statements in the questionnaire. We need to examine the patterns of these relationships. Because those patterns are so numerous, we will deal only with some of those relating to citizenship and religious identity.

In the cluster of five nations, one might hypothesize that differences would fall along an East Asian (Japan, Korea, Thailand)—South Pacific (New Zealand, Australia) axis or along a developed (Japan, Australia, New Zealand)—less developed (Korea, Thailand) axis. On grounds of an ancient cultural similarity that

**TABLE 8**  
**MEAN DIFFERENCES AMONG RESPONDENTS FROM FIVE**  
**NATIONS IN ANSWERS TO STATEMENTS ON INJUSTICE, SUFFERING,**  
**MEANINGLESSNESS, AND RELIGION GENERALLY**

	Japan	Korea	Thailand	New Zealand	Australia
Japan	x	51	45	56	52
Korea		x	50	45	47
Thailand			x	45	51
New Zealand				x	38
Australia					x

underlies, in some measure, the contemporary experience of citizenship, one might hypothesize a close relationship between Japan and Korea, but in terms of present political culture, they would be further apart. The patterns can be described roughly by using the net mean scores on each statement. The data in Table 8 indicate the results of a simple rank ordering of those scores followed by calculations of the differences in rank order. Respondents from a nation with the lowest net mean score (rank 1) and those from a nation with the highest mean score (rank 5) have a mean difference of 4. For a cluster of six statements, the minimum difference, showing most similarity of attitude and belief, is six; the maximum is 24. For the 24 statements dealing with injustice, suffering, meaninglessness, and religion generally, the possible minimum difference is 24, the possible maximum difference is 96.

The mean difference for the ten bi-national comparisons was 48. Only New Zealand and Australia were quite similar, with a total mean difference score of 38. Japan, with the highest mean difference was furthest removed from New Zealand and Australia (56 and 52), thus denying the possibility that responses would be similar among respondents from the technologically most developed nations. Korea was closer to New Zealand and Australia (45 and 47) than to Japan and Thailand (51 and 50), perhaps indicating some western influence on this group of university students. Thailand and Korea stood near the middle, with a range of only six points among their four mean difference scores.

When this general comparison was broken down by topic (meaninglessness, suffering, injustice, and religion generally), some interesting patterns appeared. The Japanese respondents were, as we would expect from the mean difference scores, most distinctive. They were least interested in questions of meaning (item 1, Table 3), least likely to believe that there is an order that someday we will understand (item 2), but most often wondered what life is all about (item 3). Australian respondents were least likely to agree that life is beyond our understanding (item 4), least likely to wonder what life is about (item 3), and least likely to believe that life is meaningful for most people (scale 3, Table 5). The Korean students most believed that there is an order that someday we will understand, most believed that life is meaningful for most people, and were most likely to say that they had a strong sense of meaningfulness in life. The last two differences, however, were not significant, that



is, Koreans were not significantly differentiated from students from other countries in their choices of alternatives on the two "meaning" questions.

Considering their responses to statements on meaning, we may find it surprising that the Japanese students were most "religious" in their responses to all four of the non-doctrinal religious statements (13-16, Table 3). Australian respondents were least religious on two (13 and 15) and the Thais least on the other two (14 and 16). In response to the two statements (17 and 18) that mention religion, however, the Japanese were least religious on the latter and next to the least on the former. These findings support the idea that we must learn to look for religious perspectives and tendencies beyond explicit memberships and doctrinal beliefs. Failure to see "invisible religion" prevents us from understanding many critical social process (cf. Luckmann, 1967).

The Japanese respondents were also distinctive on five of the six statements dealing with suffering. They were least likely to believe that suffering has been reduced or that it will be reduced and most likely to believe that it is important to attempt to reduce it. On the scales, they were most likely to say that mankind has experienced a great deal of suffering and that they individually had experienced a great deal, compared with others in their country.

The pattern with regard to responses to statements on injustice was not quite so clear-cut. The Japanese students were most likely to think the reduction of injustice is important and were most likely to say that they had experienced injustice. Australian and New Zealander respondents were least likely to agree that injustice had increased. Significantly more of them stated that injustice had been reduced; yet a minority took this view in all five countries.

From these data it seems reasonable to conclude that among our respondents the Japanese are most ready for religious involvement, particularly with organizations that promise the reduction of suffering. Seen against this evidence, it is not surprising that Japan has had a large number of sectarian movements in the last few decades (see McFarland, 1967; Morioka & Newell, 1968). Someday we may have time series data that would permit us to know whether the values and attitudes measured here preceed and lay the groundwork for such social movements.

Turning to religious identity as a predictor variable, responses to 10 of the 24 statements (leaving aside the two on politics) varied significantly by the F (net) test. It should be noted that our analysis was hampered, in assessing the influence of religious identity, by the fact that all four categories of religious identity employed (Buddhist, Protestant, Catholic, and None) were found in the Asian samples, but not in the New Zealand and Australian samples. The other predictor variables, however, were not highly interdependent with religion, and three of the religious categories were found in all five nations, with the fourth in three.

To make a general comparison, among the religious groups, the same procedure used to compare the effects of citizenship was followed. Using net mean scores for the statements dealing with meaning, suffering, injustice, and religion generally, we could find two groups as close together as 24 or as far apart as 72. The actual mean distance for the six bi-religious comparisons, as shown in Table 9, was 40. Not surprisingly, Protestants and Roman Catholics were closest; but Protestants were closer to the None category than to the Buddhists, and not far from either, an indication that most of these differences were not significant. The view of Catholics

and Buddhists were further from those who characterized themselves as having no religion or as being agnostics or atheists.

TABLE 9

**MEAN DIFFERENCES AMONG RESPONDENTS FROM FOUR RELIGIOUS  
CATEGORIES IN ANSWERS TO STATEMENTS ON INJUSTICE, SUFFERING,  
MEANINGLESSNESS, AND RELIGION GENERALLY**

	Buddhist	Protestant	Roman Catholic	None, Agnostic, Atheist
Buddhist	x	39	39	45
Protestant		x	34	38
Roman Catholic			x	46
None, Agnostic, Atheist				x

Various patterns appeared when these net mean differences for the four themes were examined separately. Buddhists had the lowest mean scores on all six of the scales found in Table 5. They were least likely to see injustice, suffering, and meaninglessness in the world (but scores for all groups were above the middle of the scale), and least likely to believe that they had personally experienced an unusual amount of injustice, suffering, or meaninglessness. Since many of the Buddhists were Japanese, who were most likely to say that mankind has experienced a great deal of suffering and most likely to believe that they personally had experienced a great deal of suffering and injustice, the religious differences take on added weight.

Roman Catholics were most religious on the sub-set of six questions dealing with religion, either directly or non-doctrinally. When only the four non-doctrinal questions are considered, however, the difference was sharply reduced. The "none" category, in fact, was as "religious" as the Buddhists and slightly more religious than the Protestants, as measured by responses to statements 13-16 of Table 3.

Contrary to what might have been expected, Buddhists were most optimistic about the reduction of suffering and injustice (or least pessimistic might be a more accurate way to put it). The other three religious categories were quite similar to each other, although Protestants and Roman Catholics tended to be more pessimistic in their appraisal of suffering in the world.

### CONCLUSIONS

This paper is an attempt to begin to map, by the use of comparative material, the distribution of non-doctrinal religious beliefs and to discover some of their social structural correlates. Three general hypotheses have been amply supported, namely that there is widespread interest in problems of meaninglessness, suffering, and injustice, a belief that they are persistent and perhaps an intrinsic part of the human condition, and yet a conviction that what we do and what we believe can transpose their meaning and significance. I am not implying that these are either happy or

unhappy facts, but only indicate that the data in hand tend to confirm their existence in a fairly heterogeneous group of respondents.

Since all three of the clusters of ideas are variables, we have also sought to specify some of the conditions under which they are stronger or weaker. Hypotheses about the effects of citizenship and religious identity have been supported, although rather weakly. Hypotheses regarding the influence of social class and sex were not supported. An unhypothesized relationship between educational level (and indirectly age, within the narrow range of university students) indicated that, on these basically non-doctrinal issues, older students were more "religious" than younger students.

Many additional lines of investigation are now required. The research instrument needs to be refined and, wherever possible, supplemented by behavioral measures. A more diverse group of respondents is needed, particularly with the addition of a wider range of ages, religions, classes, and nationalities. And measures through time, which would allow one to chart changes in the intensity and direction of belief and action regarding meaninglessness, suffering, and injustice are essential. Discovery of systematic changes during the life cycle—especially if these vary from society to society—would tell us a great deal about socialization and the experiential sources of religious belief. If we are, indeed, dealing with the underlying structures of religion, we can, by this line of investigation, add significantly to our understanding of human behavior and social process.

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