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## **Correlates of Beliefs about, and Solutions to, the Problem of Evil**

Adrian Furnham<sup>1</sup> and Charlotte Robinson<sup>2</sup>

- <sup>1.</sup> Department of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour, Norwegian Business School (BI), Nydalseveien, Oslo, Norway
- <sup>2.</sup> Department of Psychology, University of Bath

The author is contactable at [adrian@adrianfurnham.com](mailto:adrian@adrianfurnham.com)

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**Ethics:** This was sought and obtained (CEHP/514/2017)

**Informed Consent:** participants gave consent for their anonymised data to be analysed and published

**There is no conflict of interest**

### **Author Contribution**

A.F: Visualisation, Writing -review

C.R: Data curation; analysis

**Abstract**

This study explored people's attitudes towards various explanations for the theological Problem of Evil. Five hundred adults rated the importance of 16 possible solutions to the Problem of Evil. Participants also indicated their religious and political beliefs, their Belief in a Just World and their endorsement of Conspiracy Theories. Results showed that many differences in ratings were a function of religious beliefs and belief in the afterlife. The 16 solutions were subjected to a factor analysis which revealed three factors labelled Deistic, Luck and Chance, and Human Behaviour. Those who claimed to be more religious, and believed in an afterlife, were more likely to support Deistic solutions. These solutions were also supported by younger, less educated, and less intelligent people who believed in the Just World and Conspiracy theories. Just World beliefs were related to Luck/Chance explanations, whereas believing in Conspiracy theories related to Human Behaviour explanations. People appear to understand evil in terms of the will of God, fellow humans and luck/chance factors. Inevitably, Deistic explanations were rejected by most people but supported more by religious people. The results emphasised the importance of Just World Beliefs in understanding why evil exists in the world.

**Key Words:** Theodicy; Problem-of-Evil; Deistic Explanations; Just World; Conspiracy

## **Introduction**

Theodicy is an explanatory concept and technical term used by scholars to illustrate the ways in which people try to find meaning in suffering. It is considered a systematic answer to the question of why God allows evil things to occur. It is also known as the “Problem of Evil” (PoE), which is most relevant to those who believe in an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent deity and who attempt to reconcile the observation that “bad things happen to good people” (Adams, 1999; Ahern, 1971; Beyerlein et al., 2021; Blumenthal, 1993; Hall et al., 2018). However, explanations of the PoE differ among individuals who share such beliefs and observations. Mono-theistic and pan-theistic religions predominantly favour different solutions and explanations, and some solutions- like the doctrine of karma (behaviour in a previous life)- are specific to particular religions. Researchers have discussed various problems of evil, sceptical theism and the like (Church et al., 2021).

It is argued that suffering can be mitigated, or partly overcome, by understanding why an individual finds themselves in a particular negative situation. Thus, identifying differences in what people perceive as a good explanation for the PoE, may prove beneficial in understanding how different people overcome suffering. For a long time, theologians have distinguished between moral evil - caused by human agency - and various natural evils. Debates and discussions regarding the PoE continue mainly among theologians and philosophers of religion (Chester, 1998; Chester & Duncan, 2010; Coley, 2014; Devenish, 1991; Mesle, 1986; Scott, 2015; Scott & Murray, 2011; Untea, 2021; Van der Ven, 1989; Winfield, 2021), though professionals from other disciplines have become interested in the issue (Parro, 2021). The topic is also discussed and researched with respect to particular events (Kessareas, 2018; Simko 2012).

Hutsebaut (2003) proposed various understandings of God-solutions to the problem of evil. These include the *Apathetic God*, completely unmoved by suffering; the *Retributive God*, who permits suffering as punishment for sins; and the *Planning/Controlling God*, who claims it will become apparent in due course what meaningful role suffering has played. Hutsebaut also notes others like the *Therapeutic God*, who allows suffering because it is viewed as a means of purifying people; *the Compassionate God*, who reveals suffering as he reveals himself in the face of Jesus; the *Vicarious Servant of God*, where the innocent sufferer takes the place of God himself surrendering to other sufferers; and the *Mystical Unity with God*, suffering is transformed into the mystical anguish of separating from God. Yet, there have been surprisingly few psychological studies on the problem of evil, specifically how lay people, particularly believers, try to “solve the problem” (Betageri, 2008), and some researchers have called for more work in this area (Church et al., 2021).

Psychologists and psychiatrists have always seen the adoption of certain theodicies as an adaptive coping device (Currier et al., 2017; Hutsebaut, 2003; McElroy-Heltzel et al., 2018; Wilt et al., 2016). Dein made an important contribution to this literature from a psychiatric context (Dein, 2022; Dein et.al., 2013). He argued that the maintenance of religious faith is dependent on the availability of a personal theodicy framework, which can assimilate all kinds of evil. Essentially, theodicies facilitate the appraisal of traumatic events as they are cognitive schemas that allow for meaning-making. An individual’s theodicy is a “religious schema” that assists in the processing of trauma. Thus people without strong adaptive theodicies can be overwhelmed when they experience personal adversity that contradicts their religious beliefs, as they face a sense of meaninglessness and purposelessness. Subsequently, one’s religious beliefs may become altered, diminished or intensified. He notes: “Benevolent theodicies include God to be in control of suffering, his employment of suffering to build virtues into people’s characters, and his compassionate presence during suffering” (Dein, 2022, p. 397).

An early study in this field was that of Furnham and Brown (1992). Previously, in a review, they identified six well-known and rehearsed arguments/solutions to the PoE. They gave people 15 possible "explanations" for evil occurring generally or in very specific events. These explanations derived from earlier interviews conducted with lay people regarding their interpretations of evil, and Furnham and Brown (1992) retained the original phraseology as much as possible in their study. Participants also rated the sensibility of explanations for four "unfortunate" happenings; a child born blind, a child blinded by a madman, 30 people killed in a mining accident and 30 people killed in an earthquake. Results exhibited that explanations for evil could be classified as natural, theological, or due to human ignorance. These classifications depended on; the nature of the event being explained (involving its type and severity), the factors associated with an individual's religious alignments and the importance of religion in one's life.

Additionally, there is some psychometric work in this area; Daugherty et al. (2009) developed an eight-item internally reliable scale. They found that belief in theodicies moderately correlated with self-reported importance of spirituality and church attendance, but no sex differences or relationship with social desirability was evident. In a later study using this scale, Daugherty and Han (2016) discovered that a number of personal factors were significantly associated with theodicy. The results indicate that extroverts with high theodicy scores appear less open to receiving and expressing challenging ideas and tend to achieve lower college grades. They argued that the tendency to perceive God as active in the minutia of history may have implications for college student's academic and personal adjustment.

### **This Study**

In this study, we were interested in various individual correlates of lay people's beliefs in the PoE. Specifically, we investigated six classes of variables. *First*, we examined classic demographic variables, namely age, sex and education, to identify whether they were linked to

beliefs in the PoE, though we had no specific hypotheses. *Second*, we explored four belief variables: politics, religion, the after-life and optimism. We asked people how religious they were and whether they believed in an afterlife, which we surmised would be related to a number of Deistic/theological arguments for the PoE. *Third*, we measured people's self-esteem, which is a measure of self-confidence; we expected those who were more self-confident would reject theological arguments. *Fourth*, we assessed intelligence, which usually correlates with education, occupation and, therefore, social class. We expected people with higher IQ scores to be more sceptical about all PoE arguments.

*Fifth*, this study also explored the concept of *Beliefs in a Just/Unjust world (BJW)*, which refers to people's tendency to blame victims of misfortunes for their own fate. This concept argues that people have a fundamental need to believe that the (social) world is a just place; maintaining this belief is functionally necessary for developing principles of deservingness. Individuals rely on such principles to explain injustices, like why some people fall ill, are abused and descend into poverty etc., yet others are recipients of good fortune. The idea of the BJW is that it helps answer some of these difficult questions, including questions regarding the PoE. If the world is just, then evil is not "random" but the result of God or other people: bad people deserve their fate.

*Sixth*, we measured Conspiracy Theories (CTs), the beliefs that the causes of many major social, political and economic events are due to the actions of multiple, evil, secretive people with selfish, global political goals in mind. People with a *conspiracist worldview* seem to form a *monological* belief system (Walter & Drochon, 2020). People accept and integrate new CTs on a wide range of issues, which often include strange, new and outlandish ideas because they serve a psychological function for those who feel powerless, excluded or disadvantaged (Furnham & Grover, 2021). For instance, conspiracy theorists could support

superstitious, magical, and paranormal beliefs with no credible scientific evidence. We expected that CTs would be related to PoE solutions that identified individuals as wicked.

## Method

### Participants

There were 502 participants: 254 males and 248 females. They ranged in age from 28 to 69 years, with a modal age of 36-years ( $M = 37.96$ ,  $SD = 8.01$ ). Participants were from a range of European countries, primarily the United Kingdom. In all, 70.9% were graduates. With regard to their religious beliefs (1 = *Not at all* to 9 = *Very*) they scored a mean of 3.80 ( $SD = 3.01$ ). Concerning belief in the afterlife, 41.3% said they did believe in it, and 58.7% said they did not. Participants rated their political views from 1 = *Very Conservative* to 9 = *Very Liberal* with a mean of 5.83 ( $SD = 1.81$ ). They rated “I am an optimist” from 10 = *Agree* to 1 = *Disagree* ( $M = 6.74$ ,  $SD = 2.15$ ).

### Questionnaires

*Problem of Evil* (Furnham & Brown, 1992). This was a 16-item questionnaire that was used to examine the perceived veridicality of answers to the Problem of Evil. Each item/explanation for evil was rated on a scale from 1 (not important/good) to 9 (important/good). The instructions read that the study was interested in “what you believe the explanation of general human suffering to be”.

*Self-Esteem*. Each participant rated four factors on a scale from 1-100: Physical Attractiveness ( $M = 62.16$ ,  $SD = 19.23$ ), Physical Health ( $M = 69.07$ ,  $SD = 18.18$ ), Intelligence (IQ) ( $M = 73.09$ ,  $SD = 13.49$ ) and Emotional Intelligence ( $M = 72.81$ ,  $SD = 17.01$ ). The Alpha for these four items was .73 and they were summed together to form a variable labelled Self-Esteem.



*Conspiracy Thinking* (Walter & Drochon, 2020). This was a 10-item scale devised as part of the Conspiracy and Democracy project at the University of Cambridge. It consisted of 10 statements that were generic and not connected to any specific societal, economic or political systems. The scale was administered to over 11,000 people and examined for its psychometric properties. In this study, the Alpha was .60, which is lower than the usual .70 cut-off for acceptability.

*Belief in a Just World*. Rubin & Peplau (1975) devised a 20-item self-report inventory to measure the attitudinal continuity between two opposite poles, total acceptance and rejection of the notion that the world is a just place. The scale has been quoted over 650 times in the academic literature. Because some items were both dated and country specific, six were removed, leaving nine Just World and four Unjust World items remaining. The Cronbach Alpha in this study for the Just World was .88, and .82 for the Unjust World.

*The Wonderlic Personnel Test* (Wonderlic, 1990). This 50-item test can be administered in 12 minutes and measures general intelligence. Items include word and number comparisons, disarranged sentences and story problems that require mathematical and logical solutions. The test has impressive norms and correlates very highly ( $r = .92$ ) with the WAIS-R. In this study, we used 16 items from Form A.

## **Procedure**

Departmental ethical approval was received prior to data collection (CEHP/514/2019). Data was collected online through *Prolific*, a platform like the better-known Amazon-Turk. We specified that participants needed to be over 30 years, working and fluent in English. Participants were compensated for their time (receiving £2.50). Usual data cleansing and checking led to the rejection of around 5% of recruited participants before further analysis.

## **Results**

**Insert Table 1 here**

The first analysis assessed differences in perceptions of the PoE solutions between participants who said they did and did not believe in an afterlife. Two things are striking about the ANOVA results. First, the mean scores for most “solutions” were low, indicating that participants saw these as poor/weak explanations, especially items 8, 9 and 13, while only three (1, 2 and 4) received mean scores of over five on the point scale. Second, there were many large differences between the two groups (nine in all). The Cohen’s *d* shows that nine items were  $> .30$ .

**Insert Table 2**

The 16 items from the Problem of Evil questionnaire were then subjected to a Varimax rotated factor analysis. Three factors emerged, which accounted for around half of the variance. The first factor had eight items loading on it and accounted for a third of the variance. This factor was labelled *Deistic* concepts. The second factor had items loading on it which, essentially, referred to Luck and Chance concepts. The third factor was comprised of the three items that were rated most highly and which referred to Human Behaviour.

**Insert Table 3 here**

Table 3 displays the correlations between all the individual difference variables and the three factors which emerged from the above factor analysis. Of the three demographic factors (sex, age, education), results revealed that males favoured the Human Behaviour explanation over females, and older vs younger people rejected Deistic and Luck/Chance explanations. The highest correlation was between how religious a person indicated they were and the first factor. Seven of the nine individual difference factors correlated significantly with the first factor, but only two with the second and third factors.

### Insert Table 4 here

Three multiple regressions were computed to explore the relative power of various individual difference factors in the favoured explanations (see Table 4). Results indicate that a number of factors were related to the first factor labelled Deistic. People who were less intelligent, religious, believed in the afterlife and endorsed the Just World hypothesis were more likely to support this “explanation” for the PoE. On the other hand, pessimists who supported the BJWtheory were more likely to endorse the second factor. Only one variable was related to the third factor, implying that supporters of CTs were more likely to believe that Human Behaviour, rather than God, accounts for evil.

### Discussion

The PoE is mainly, but not exclusively, an issue for those who believe in an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent deity. Evil is effectively a moral and theological concept rather than a psychological one. Psychologists tend to view human evil doing as a lack of empathy and the presence of psychopathic traits like; callousness, manipulateness and selfishness. For instance, Zimbardo (2007) argued that anyone is capable of behaving in evil ways under the right specific conditions. Under these conditions, man’s inhumanity to man is explicable in terms of a particular personality profile, essentially someone with no conscience (super-ego).

It remains unclear how much of a problem the PoE is, or perhaps should be, for believers in the major monotheistic religions (Pargament, 2011). There are numerous “popular” books that address this; many share similar titles, like *Why Do/When Bad Things Happen To Good People* (Kushner 2004; Tinker 2009). There are now also a large number of blogs with this theme which offer a wide variety of answers, like “what we see and interpret as bad is not really bad per se, but often are blessings and goodness in disguise”. The question we addressed in this study was how good people perceived these explanations or “solutions” to be.

For non-believers, many “solutions” or explanations for the PoE seem little more than sophistry or casuistry. For the non-believers, human cruelty and carelessness, alongside fate and chance events, are sufficient to explain evil. Explanations are psychological- or technical in the case of “natural disasters”.

The first observation from this study illustrates how weak (i.e., unimportant) people feel some standard arguments are (see Table 1). Clearly, participants who did not believe in an afterlife, or were less religious, rejected all God-Inspired explanations. The factor analysis of the 16 explanations/solutions identified three factors in the literature. Evil and tragedies can be attributable to God, fellow humans and luck/chance factors. Thus, the random killings by a “mad person” could easily be attributed to psychological factors, whereas numerous deaths in an earthquake are attributable to chance geographic events. In this sense, evil is less difficult to explain if one is not a believer in an all-powerful and loving God.

One of the interesting findings from this study, revealed in Tables 3 and 4, was which individual factors *did not* correlate with the three factors; Deistic, Luck and Chance concepts and Human Behaviour. Self-esteem was unrelated to all explanations, while sex and politics had little impact. We did find that better-educated and more intelligent people tended to rate the Deity factor less. This may simply reflect the observation that brighter people tend not to be believers (Zuckerman, 2019) though this finding warrants further explanation.

In this study, we explored BJWs, which could be seen as a secular ideology that attempts to resolve personal tragedies, such as why some people become sick or victims of other misfortunes while others do not. Maintaining BJW helps answer many topical moral, political and social questions and increase well-being. Equally, Unjust World views have the opposite correlates.

Related to this was our investigation of the role of CTs, which has now attracted a great deal of attention (Furnham & Grover, 2021). It has been argued that CTs serve a psychological function for people who feel powerless, excluded or disadvantaged. Often CTs contain superstitious, magical, and paranormal beliefs which attract particular people. It is quite possible that some events, particularly those involving human behaviour, become more explicable with conspiracy thinking.

Like all studies, the present research had limitations. Whilst we had a reasonably sized participant group, they were unrepresentative of general populations, being younger and better educated than most. It would have been interesting to gain insight into each participant's belief system and religious history, such as any religion and denomination in which they were raised and educated; this would provide further insight into the factors that correlate with perceptions of the PoE. It would also have been fascinating to know about any highly negative personal events where participants questioned the cause, especially if they were believers. Furthermore, future research should include a "free response" to a number of evil events, be they man-made or not, to hear the "language" used; this would provide further detail and understanding that the present study may have overlooked through utilising point scale questionnaires. Likewise, it would be particularly intriguing to get groups of self-confessed believers and interrogate them to see what explanations they would proffer. Finally, this is a correlational study, which does not allow us to infer causation.

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**Table 1**

*Anova based on Belief -in-the-Afterlife (Yes= 207; No=294)*

		Mean	SD	F	Cohen's <i>d</i>																																																																																																																																				
The result of human ignorance and incompetence (PO1)	Yes	6.08	1.74	0.49	.06																																																																																																																																				
	No	6.18	1.43			Man's deliberate inhumanity to man (PO2)	Yes	6.25	1.66	2.26	.14	No	6.03	1.57	Punishments sent by God for previous sins (PO3)	Yes	2.77	2.11	68.61***	.47	No	1.50	1.32	The moral decay of people (PO4)	Yes	5.56	1.99	12.21***	.32	No	4.87	2.28	To test our faith in God (PO5)	Yes	3.08	2.32	70.22***	.51	No	1.63	1.56	The bad behaviour of people on a previous life (PO6)	Yes	2.75	2.12	46.57***	.39	No	1.63	1.55	It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10	No	4.80	2.05	To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17
Man's deliberate inhumanity to man (PO2)	Yes	6.25	1.66	2.26	.14																																																																																																																																				
	No	6.03	1.57			Punishments sent by God for previous sins (PO3)	Yes	2.77	2.11	68.61***	.47	No	1.50	1.32	The moral decay of people (PO4)	Yes	5.56	1.99	12.21***	.32	No	4.87	2.28	To test our faith in God (PO5)	Yes	3.08	2.32	70.22***	.51	No	1.63	1.56	The bad behaviour of people on a previous life (PO6)	Yes	2.75	2.12	46.57***	.39	No	1.63	1.55	It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10	No	4.80	2.05	To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23						
Punishments sent by God for previous sins (PO3)	Yes	2.77	2.11	68.61***	.47																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.50	1.32			The moral decay of people (PO4)	Yes	5.56	1.99	12.21***	.32	No	4.87	2.28	To test our faith in God (PO5)	Yes	3.08	2.32	70.22***	.51	No	1.63	1.56	The bad behaviour of people on a previous life (PO6)	Yes	2.75	2.12	46.57***	.39	No	1.63	1.55	It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10	No	4.80	2.05	To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23															
The moral decay of people (PO4)	Yes	5.56	1.99	12.21***	.32																																																																																																																																				
	No	4.87	2.28			To test our faith in God (PO5)	Yes	3.08	2.32	70.22***	.51	No	1.63	1.56	The bad behaviour of people on a previous life (PO6)	Yes	2.75	2.12	46.57***	.39	No	1.63	1.55	It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10	No	4.80	2.05	To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																								
To test our faith in God (PO5)	Yes	3.08	2.32	70.22***	.51																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.63	1.56			The bad behaviour of people on a previous life (PO6)	Yes	2.75	2.12	46.57***	.39	No	1.63	1.55	It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10	No	4.80	2.05	To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																	
The bad behaviour of people on a previous life (PO6)	Yes	2.75	2.12	46.57***	.39																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.63	1.55			It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10	No	4.80	2.05	To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																										
It is simply a natural part of life (PO7)	Yes	4.59	2.11	1.19	.10																																																																																																																																				
	No	4.80	2.05			To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35	No	1.46	1.28	It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																			
To help people appreciate the suffering of God (PO8)	Yes	2.69	2.21	61.83***	.35																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.46	1.28			It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33	No	1.53	1.47	It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																												
It is due to the work of the Devil (PO9)	Yes	2.61	2.11	45.21***	.33																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.53	1.47			It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47	No	1.60	1.52	Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																					
It is because we do not understand the will of God (PO10)	Yes	3.06	2.33	72.21***	.47																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.60	1.52			Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78	No	1.76	1.71	Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																														
Because God has given us free-will (PO11)	Yes	3.81	2.64	111.75***	.78																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.76	1.71			Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20	No	3.15	1.93	To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																																							
Because anything worthwhile involves discomfort (PO12)	Yes	3.57	2.20	5.12*	.20																																																																																																																																				
	No	3.15	1.93			To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39	No	1.72	1.40	Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																																																
To show people that evil can lead to good (PO13)	Yes	2.38	1.94	19.25***	.39																																																																																																																																				
	No	1.72	1.40			Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19	No	4.80	2.12	Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																																																									
Because of the nature of the physical universe (PO14)	Yes	4.40	2.17	4.13*	.19																																																																																																																																				
	No	4.80	2.12			Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01	No	4.14	2.38	Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																																																																		
Because of some unfortunate genetic deformities (PO15)	Yes	4.11	2.38	0.02	.01																																																																																																																																				
	No	4.14	2.38			Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17	No	3.77	2.23																																																																																																																											
Simply bad luck (PO16)	Yes	3.41	2.12	3.21	.17																																																																																																																																				
	No	3.77	2.23																																																																																																																																						

*Note.* Scale 1= Unimportant – 9=Very important

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Table 2***Factor Analysis*

	1	2	3
PO5	<b>.88</b>	.03	.10
PO10	<b>.86</b>	.05	.07
PO8	<b>.85</b>	.12	.02
PO2	<b>.84</b>	-.02	.06
PO9	<b>.78</b>	-.02	-.02
PO11	<b>.71</b>	.06	.16
PO6	<b>.69</b>	.07	.07
PO13	<b>.66</b>	.29	.02
PO7	.04	<b>.76</b>	-.03
PO14	-.02	<b>.76</b>	.10
PO15	.06	<b>.74</b>	.02
PO16	.08	<b>.71</b>	-.17
PO12	.41	<b>.49</b>	.10
PO2	-.03	.01	<b>.83</b>
PO1	.03	-.003	<b>.72</b>
PO4	.32	-.04	<b>.67</b>
Eigenvalue	5.52	2.42	1.62
Variance	34.53%	15.12%	10.12%

*Note. Bold items are those that load >.40 on each factor*

**Table 3***Means, SD and Correlations between all the variables*

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
(1)Sex	1.49	.50													
(2)Age	37.96	8.02	.00												
(3)Degree	1.29	.46	-.02	.21***											
(4)Religious	3.80	3.01	.04	.02	.06										
(5)Politics	5.83	1.81	.13**	-.03	-.07	-.23***									
(6)Optimist	6.74	2.15	.09*	.10*	.03	.20***	.01								
(7)Afterlife	1.59	.49	-.11*	-.05	-.10*	-.50***	.12**	-.22***							
(8)Self Esteem	276.86	50.71	-.03	.02	-.11*	.17***	.00	.36***	-.10*						
(9)JWB	14.86	10.16	-.17***	.04	.02	.04	-.14**	.27***	-.03	.21***					
(10)Conspiracy Th	2.02	1.77	.11*	-.05	.09	.41***	-.23***	.08	-.28***	.00	-.02				
(11)IQTot	10.27	2.83	-.15***	.05	-.14**	-.25***	.08	-.11*	.19***	.04	.03	-.36***			
(12)POE F1	42.14	13.43	<b>.03</b>	<b>-.12**</b>	<b>.12**</b>	<b>.59***</b>	<b>-.18***</b>	<b>.10*</b>	<b>-.41***</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>.09*</b>	<b>.41***</b>	<b>-.39***</b>		
(13)POE F2	21.03	7.28	<b>-.06</b>	<b>-.10*</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>-.05</b>	<b>-.13**</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>-.04</b>	<b>.11*</b>	<b>.02</b>	<b>-.03</b>	.24***	
(14)POE F3	5.53	2.81	<b>.12**</b>	<b>-.04</b>	<b>.04</b>	<b>.17***</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>.03</b>	<b>-.10*</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>-.08</b>	<b>.28***</b>	<b>-.12**</b>	.24***	.00

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Table 4***Results of the Hierarchical Regression*

	Factor 1				Factor 2				Factor 3			
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>
Sex	-.73	.86	-.03	-0.85	-.19	.57	-.02	-0.34	.59	.36	.07	1.63
Age	-.20	.05	-.13	-3.78***	-.07	.04	-.09	-1.92	-.02	.02	-.03	-0.73
Degree	2.02	.95	.08	2.13*	.55	.62	.04	0.88	.23	.40	.03	0.57
Religious	1.70	.17	.42	9.88***	.05	.11	.03	0.46	.08	.07	.06	1.09
Politics	-.10	.24	-.01	-0.40	-.06	.16	-.02	-0.36	.10	.10	.05	0.98
Optimist	-.34	.22	-.06	-1.55	-.44	.14	-.16	-3.08**	-.08	.09	-.05	-0.91
Afterlife	-3.54	.98	-.14	-3.61***	.49	.65	.04	0.75	.01	.41	.00	0.03
Self-Esteem	.00	.01	.01	0.32	-.00	.01	-.02	-0.31	.01	.00	.11	2.34*
JWB	.12	.05	.10	2.65**	.09	.03	.15	3.02**	-.02	.02	-.05	-1.14
Conspiracy Th	.70	.27	.10	2.58*	.01	.18	.00	0.07	.57	.11	.26	5.04***
IQ	-.93	.16	-.22	-5.80***	-.12	.11	-.06	-1.18	.00	.07	.00	0.04
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.44				.03				.08		
<i>F</i>		36.24				2.33				4.85		
<i>p</i>		.000				.009				.000		

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

