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Personality and Individual Differences

Intellectual humility's links to religion and spirituality and the role of authoritarianism☆

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	A US community sample of 302 adults completed surveys suggesting small, negative links between intellectual humility and a variety of religious/spiritual variables as well as parabolic relationships with highest levels of intellectual humility occurring among those with low and high levels of religion/spirituality. Longitudinal analyses (N = 100) indicated a number of religious/spiritual variables predicted less intellectual humility 3 years later. Right-wing authoritarianism accounted for most of the links between religion/spirituality and intellectual humility, suggesting that it is not religion/spirituality per se, but rather sociopolitical attitudes about authority that are associated with decreases in intellectual humility. After controlling right-wing authoritarianism, a small, negative relationship remained between religious participation and intellectual humility.

1. Introduction

Most people hold convictions ranging across social, political, and cultural domains. Convictions involve firmly held beliefs or opinions that are often associated with behavioral commitments. The central question of this paper is how convictions and associated commitments relate to intellectual humility (IH). Specifically, this paper explores whether it is possible to be intellectually humble and simultaneously deeply committed to religious or spiritual beliefs. This question is critical given the longstanding suggestion in the field of psychology that the nature of people's religious beliefs - including their claims to absolute truth, their willingness to doubt, and their openness to changing beliefs - is closely tied to the way they view and treat others (Allport, 1954; James, 1902). The current study examines IH as a potential individual differences variable for understanding these important outcomes of religious beliefs.

IH is a form of humility related to the way people apply knowledge. IH can be defined as a nonthreatening awareness of one's intellectual fallibility (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016). This assumes the intellectually humble person understands that cognitive faculties are not perfect and that knowledge, judgment, and perceptions are sometimes incorrect. Additionally, the person does not feel threatened by this, meaning that mental fallibility is accepted without feelings of defensiveness. It is most fitting to study IH in the context of beliefs and

opinions that are of greatest importance to people, making religion/spirituality a relevant domain in which to examine IH.

Here, religion and spirituality are defined as a range of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that individuals use to connect with the sacred or divine, either within or outside of institutional contexts (Miller-Perrin & Krumrei-Mancuso, 2015). The majority of individuals in the U.S. label themselves as both religious and spiritual and there is evidence of overlap between the two constructs (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Marler & Hadaway, 2002; Zinnbauer et al., 1997). Nevertheless, the general population tends to view the meaning of religion and spirituality differently (Zinnbauer et al., 1997). The current research assessed both religion and spirituality, but did not emphasize a strong conceptual distinction between the two.

Previous research has indicated that although IH is associated with greater tolerance toward others, it is unrelated to conformity, social confidence or low self-regard, and has small, positive links to self-confidence (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016). This suggests that IH is related to accepting people whose beliefs are different from one's own and not judging or rejecting those with different opinions, but that IH is not associated with being susceptible to social influence or modifying beliefs or behaviors to fit others' standards. This supports the idea that IH can co-occur with strong convictions. Yet, this has never been examined explicitly within the religious/spiritual domain.

1.1. The value of intellectual humility

IH allows people to grow in understanding. Individuals who accept that their knowledge is not perfect will be in a position to consider other viewpoints, add to their knowledge, and discover biases and errors in their thinking. In addition, IH benefits interpersonal relationships. A nonthreatening awareness of one's intellectual fallibility is likely to make one better at listening to and respecting others, even in the face of disagreements. Indeed, research shows that people who are perceived as intellectually humble are more likeable, trustworthy, and forgivable (Hook et al., 2015; McElroy et al., 2014; Zhang et al., 2015). Further, IH is associated with less aggressive behavioral intentions toward those who criticize one's beliefs (Van Tongeren et al., 2016).

A number of studies have examined the social benefits of IH with regard to religion, specifically. A growing body of literature indicates that religious IH, i.e., IH about one's religious beliefs, is associated with beneficial social attitudes and behaviors, including more acceptance and warmth for those who are religiously different (Hook et al., 2017; Van Tongeren et al., 2016), less extreme reactions toward others' religious viewpoints (Hopkin, Hoyle, & Toner, 2014), greater likelihood of deriving a sense of belonging and meaning from ideologically diverse religious groups (Zhang et al., 2016), and greater forgiveness of religious conflicts (Zhang et al., 2015). Similarly, the closely related construct of Quest orientation to religion (Batson & Schoenrade, 1991) - involving the ability to face existential questions without reducing their complexity, the ability to be self-critical, an openness to change in religious beliefs, and an appreciation for religious doubt – has been associated with greater openness, compassion, and kindness toward others, even in comparison to other positive religious orientations (Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russel, 2001; Batson, Floyd, Meyer, & Winner, 1999).

On this basis, the qualities that embody IH have clear implications for fruitful social bonds, collaboration, and public discourse. Due to these potential benefits, it is relevant to consider the personal characteristics or experiences that can promote or hinder IH. One such factor may be religion/spirituality.

1.2. Empirical links between religion/spirituality and intellectual humility

Although numerous studies focus on the benefits of IH, not many have examined the factors that promote or hinder IH, including religion/spirituality. Early research found links between religious orientation and constructs associated with IH, namely open versus closed-mindedness (Thompson, 1974). Specifically, Roman Catholic individuals who were anti-religious, scoring low in both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity, reported higher open-mindedness and lower closed-mindedness than those scoring higher in religiosity. Correspondingly, individuals scoring high in both intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity tended to report more closed-mindedness than those with lower levels of religiosity. These findings must be interpreted with caution, given some measurement confounds; nevertheless, this study hints that religiosity could be predictive of closed-mindedness and thereby, perhaps, a lack of IH.

Research specific to IH and religion/spirituality has been recent, but is a growing area of interest in personality and social psychology. Preston and Shin (2017) found that priming people to think about spiritual experiences neither increased nor decreased IH. They had participants recall strong feelings of spirituality and connection to the divine or a deep connection to the universe or world around them. Although this was associated with an increased sense of spiritual humility, it did not impact levels of IH. This offers an initial indication that Thompson's (1974) suggestion that religiosity is negatively related to open-mindedness does not extend to spirituality.

Further, Leary et al. (2017) found that IH was uncorrelated with general religiosity (religious activity and intrinsic religious motivation). However, they found that higher levels of religiosity were associated

with greater expressed certainty that one's views about religion were correct. IH moderated this, as those with more IH expressed less extreme opinions about religion, less strong beliefs that their religious views were correct, and a preference for balanced arguments on the topic of religion.

Thus, there is some suggestion that religiosity may be associated with less open-mindedness, yet strong links between IH and religiosity/spirituality have not been observed. The limited number of studies available on this topic and the lack of consensus within the literature points to the need for more research to draw stronger conclusions about the relationship between IH and religion/spirituality.

1.3. Study goals

There are strong theoretical and empirical bases to suggest IH offers a host of potential benefits, including positive social attitudes and behaviors. For this reason, it is relevant to consider religion/spirituality, a personal characteristics that may relate to IH. This may elucidate reasons that religion/spirituality has been associated with the way individuals view and treat others.

Given the paucity of information about how religion/spirituality relates to general levels of IH, the goal of the current research was to examine whether religion/spirituality is associated with more or less IH within a community sample of adults. Longitudinal analyses were used to examine whether levels of religion/spirituality could predict levels of IH over a three-year period, presumed to be sufficient time to observe individual change in the variables of interest without intervention. Another goal of the current research was to explore potential curvilinear relationships, given that previous research has observed curvilinear links between the strength of a person's religious beliefs and his/her religious IH (Hopkin et al., 2014).

Finally, given that IH can be viewed as multifaceted in nature, involving openness to revising one's viewpoint, respect for others' viewpoints, not taking intellectual differences personally, and lack of intellectual overconfidence (Krumrei-Mancuso & Rouse, 2016), a goal of this research was to examine if aspects of IH are impacted differently by religion/spirituality.

1.4. Theoretical links and hypotheses

There are theoretical bases for arguing that religion/spirituality might increase as well as decrease IH. Sociocultural events offer vivid illustrations of religious adherents attempting to force their beliefs on others. One reason religion/spirituality may challenge IH is the high importance placed on these values due to the benefits they offer, such as meaning, coping, and terror management. On social levels, religion can also be used to maintain power differentials. Given these influences, individuals may not be open to being wrong or considering other options. Further, some forms of religiosity—such as religious fundamentalism—may be motivated out of a need for cognitive closure (Brandt & Reyna, 2010), suggesting that these forms of religion may be associated with less IH. Further, most religions have some form of dogma or absolute teachings, and holding beliefs in a way that is not open to question could conflict with an intellectually humble stance. Some have even argued that epistemic modesty is not a viable option for individuals who view their beliefs as God-given truth (Fisch, 2003).

Others have argued that relying on religious authority is not necessarily inconsistent with IH (Gregg & Mahadevan, 2014). Moreover, many have emphasized that a closed-minded approach to religion that promotes socio-political aggression or poor treatment of others is starkly inconsistent with the teachings of the world religions, and religion/spirituality can, in fact, promote IH (Woodruff, Van Tongeren, McElroy, Davis, & Hook, 2014). There are religious teachings that extoll IH as a form of wisdom (Gericke, 2011) and religious traditions that promote humility in both spiritual and intellectual domains (Cornille, 2008). For example, a number of theologians have argued that humility