

# Belief in Creation in the Image of God Violates the Individualizing-Binding Dichotomy of Moral Foundations

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## Abstract

Moral foundations theory proposes that there are two types of moral domains: the individualizing domain, which relates to individual welfare (comprising harm and fairness foundations), and the binding domain, which relates to communal and spiritual welfare (comprising loyalty, authority, and purity foundations). In this investigation, we demonstrate that this distinction is not universal. Specifically, across five studies (total  $N = 1,211$ ) conducted among Jews in Israel and Christians in the United States, we show that the core religious belief that people are created in the image of God is associated not only with purity/divinity values that are typically considered to be part of the binding domain but also with the individualizing moral domain. In two correlational studies, we find that this belief is highly correlated with religiosity but that it predicts greater endorsement of the individualizing moral domain (Studies 1–2). Two experimental studies further establish that this belief is associated with endorsing the individualizing moral domain and the moral foundation of purity, but not the communal foundations (Studies 3–4). Finally, in Study 5, we demonstrate that these experimental findings are not driven by belief in God. We conclude that the distinction between individualizing and binding moral domains is more culturally contingent than previously believed. We discuss the broader implications of the belief in creation in the image of God for understanding moral judgments pertaining to human dignity.

## Keywords

morality, culture, religion, human dignity, moral foundations

Influential theorizing on human morality has distinguished between two types of moral domains—the so-called individualizing moral domain (related to individual welfare) and the binding moral domain (related to communal and spiritual welfare; Graham et al., 2011). In this investigation, we show how particular beliefs can undermine this distinction. Specifically, we show that the

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core religious belief that people are created in the image of God is associated not only with purity/divinity values that are typically considered to be part of the binding domain but also with the individualizing moral domain.

## Individualizing Versus Binding Moral Domains

According to moral foundations theory, a key distinction in the domain of human morality is between the individualizing moral domain and the binding moral domain (Graham et al., 2011). Under the individualizing moral domain (which includes the foundations of harm and fairness), actions are judged by how much harm they cause and whether they are fair. Under the binding moral domain (which includes the foundations of loyalty, authority, and purity), actions are judged by their effect on the community and whether they are degrading or cause impurity. An influential line of work has relied on primarily Western and college-educated samples to argue that the communal foundations (loyalty and authority) and the purity foundations go together: variables that predict greater endorsement of communal foundations also predict greater endorsement of the purity foundation, including political ideology (e.g., Graham et al., 2009; Kivikangas et al., 2021) and religiosity (e.g., Graham & Haidt, 2010; Saroglou & Craninx, 2021). For example, Graham and colleagues (2009) found that political conservatives are more likely to endorse both communal and purity foundations than political liberals. Additional studies have adopted the distinction between individualizing and binding moral domains when investigating a wide range of psychological phenomena, including prosocial behavior (Clark et al., 2017), intergroup relations (I. H. Smith et al., 2014), abstract versus concrete mindsets (Napier & Luguri, 2013), and self-control (Mooijman et al., 2018). Against this backdrop, we argue that a core religious belief, namely that people are created in the image of God, predicts a unique structure of the moral domain that violates the distinction between binding and individualizing moral domains.

## Belief in Creation in the Image of God

The biblical creation myth describes humans as being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27, NIV):

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness. . . .” So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

The moral implications of this idea are then drawn out (Genesis 9:6, NIV):

Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

Thus, according to the biblical account, every individual has equal moral worth by virtue of being created in the image of God (Cherlow, 2009). Based on this belief, any injury caused to another person may be construed as a violation of two different moral domains. First, it is a violation of the individualizing domain for causing harm and for being unfair (to the extent that the injury is unequal or discriminatory). Second, we argue, it violates also the foundation of purity. Being created in the image of God means that each person is a reflection of the divine. Thus, according to this belief, any injury caused to a human may also be construed as a violation of the purity foundation because it violates an individual’s divine image. For example, in explaining the recent Catechism condemning the use of capital punishment, the Archdiocese of New York stated: “It is very difficult to keep in mind that even evil people are made in the image and likeness of God, and that they don’t lose their inherent dignity because they have turned away from God and His

**Table 1.** Hierarchical Classification of Elements of the Moral Domain.

Source	Term		Elements			
	Domains					
Graham et al. (2011)	(Foundations)	Individualizing	Binding			
(Shweder et al., 1997)	Codes	Autonomy	Community		Divinity	
Haidt and Graham (2007);	Foundations	Harm	Fairness	Loyalty	Authority	Purity
Graham et al. (2011)		(Care)	(Reciprocity)	(Ingroup)	(Respect)	(Sanctity)

Note. Terms in parentheses refer to interchangeable terminology. For simplicity, these will not be used in the present investigation.

law” (Mechmann, 2018). This core religious belief can thus be leveraged to protect the moral status of an *individual* based on a reason rooted in the purity moral foundation, which is otherwise typically thought of as a binding foundation (Graham et al., 2011). Indeed, the very name of an Israeli human rights organization, *B’tselem* (literally “in [God’s] image”), is an explicit reference to the Biblical account of Adam being created in the image of God.

This analysis suggests that belief in creation in the image of God (belief in CIG) predicts a unique moral structure, such that it is associated with the individualizing moral domain and the purity foundation that belongs to the binding moral domain. This unique structure violates the distinction between individualizing and binding moral domains (Graham et al., 2009). Below, we present specific hypotheses regarding how belief in CIG shapes moral judgment. Before doing so, we first clarify our usage of terms for elements of the moral domain.

## Usage of Terms in the Moral Domain

Pluralistic approaches to morality, which assume that moral judgments are driven by more than one set of values or principles, have divided the moral domain using various distinctions. Throughout the present investigation, we use three sets of distinctions for various purposes (see Table 1): moral domains, moral codes, and moral foundations.

### A Hierarchy of Domains, Codes, and Foundations

We have argued that belief in CIG violates the distinction between the *individualizing* moral domain and the *binding* moral domain (Graham et al., 2011). Next, we use Shweder et al.’s (1997) three moral codes, which we define below, to propose how belief in CIG shapes the moral domain. Finally, we test this at the operational level using a distinction between five foundations (Graham et al., 2011; Haidt & Graham, 2007), two of which are subsumed by the moral code of autonomy and the individualizing domain (*harm* and *fairness*), two of which are subsumed by the moral code of community (*loyalty* and *authority*), and one of which corresponds to the moral code of divinity (*purity*).

### Codes

Shweder et al. (1997) offered a framework for dividing the moral landscape into three codes: autonomy, community, and divinity. This framework was the precursor to moral foundations theory (Graham et al., 2011). The moral code of autonomy is concerned with individual welfare and its aim is to “protect the zone of discretionary choice of ‘individuals’ and to promote the exercise of individual will in the pursuit of personal preferences” (Shweder et al., 1997, p. 138). This code corresponds fully to the individualizing domain. The moral codes of community and

divinity divide the binding domain into two: the community code is concerned with the social welfare of one's community, and its aim is to "protect the moral integrity of the various stations or roles that constitute a 'society' or 'community'" (p. 138). The divinity code is concerned with spiritual welfare and its aim is to "protect the soul, the spirit, the spiritual aspects of the human agent and 'nature' from degradation" (p. 138). As we explain below, we expect that under belief in CIG, the moral codes of *autonomy* and *divinity* group together rather than the codes of *community* and *divinity* grouping together.

## Foundations

Moral Foundations Theory built on Shweder et al.'s three moral codes to distinguish between five moral foundations. The five moral foundations maintain the distinction between the three moral codes but split two moral codes in two (Graham et al., 2011; Haidt & Graham, 2007): the autonomy code is split into harm and fairness foundations, and the community code is split into loyalty and authority foundations. Our measurement of the moral domain captures these five foundations—consequently, we articulate our hypotheses below with regard to these five foundations.

The moral foundations of harm and fairness are both concerned with individual welfare but divide the moral code of autonomy and the individualizing domain into two. Harm is concerned with any type of injury, pain, or damage caused to an individual. Fairness is concerned with the fair and equal treatment of individuals. Next, the moral foundations of loyalty and authority are both concerned with communal welfare but split the moral code of community into two. Loyalty is concerned with allegiance and devotion to one's community. Authority is concerned with showing respect to authority figures and fulfilling the duties of one's social role. Finally, purity corresponds fully to the moral code of divinity.

## Hypotheses: Belief in CIG and the Moral Domain

Having characterized belief in CIG and clarified elements of the moral domain and the terminology used to describe them, we articulate our predictions regarding how belief in CIG should shape the endorsement of different elements of the moral domain. As we noted above, the belief that every individual is created in the image of God confers a unique worth to individual human beings. Therefore, we predict that belief in CIG will be associated with greater endorsement of the moral foundation of harm (hypothesis H1). This unique worth is both common and inherent to all human beings. Therefore, we predict that belief in CIG will be associated with greater endorsement of the moral foundation of fairness, which is concerned with people being treated equally (hypothesis H2). Furthermore, as we noted above, being created in the image of God means that every person reflects the divine. Therefore, we predict that belief in CIG will be associated with greater endorsement of the moral foundation of purity, which is concerned, among other things, with offenses against the divine (hypothesis H3). To the extent that belief in CIG increases the endorsement of harm (H1), fairness (H2), and purity (H3), it should be associated with relatively weaker endorsement of the foundations under the communal code, including loyalty and authority (hypothesis H4). These foundations are dedicated to the interests of one's social unit and are thus less related to an individual's self-worth or relations with the divine.

A method of capturing the differential endorsement of the three moral codes (greater endorsement of autonomy and divinity, relative to community) is via the aggregate measure of *progressivism* (<https://www.MoralFoundations.org>; see, e.g., Clark et al., 2017), which captures the endorsement of autonomy relative to the endorsement of community and divinity. For instance, people who highly endorse the moral codes of community and divinity more than autonomy, such as individuals with highly conservative political views (Graham et al., 2009), will have a negative progressivism score. In contrast, people who more highly endorse the moral code of autonomy than community or

divinity, such as individuals with liberal political views (Graham et al., 2009), will have a positive progressivism score. Meanwhile, people who more highly endorse the moral codes of autonomy and divinity than community, as we expect under the belief in CIG, will have a weak or null score for progressivism. In other words, progressivism captures how well the moral codes of community and divinity go together, and how well they are dissociated from the moral code of autonomy. In contrast to religiosity, belief in CIG should be associated with progressivism only weakly, if at all (H5).

## Summary of Studies

We tested how belief in CIG predicts a unique structure of moral judgment using both correlational methods (Studies 1–2) and experimental methods (Studies 3–5). Given that belief in CIG is strongly linked to religious belief (or belief in God), we measured both in Studies 1–2 and manipulated them independently in Study 5. To demonstrate the generalizability of findings across two different national and religious boundaries, samples included Jews in Israel (Studies 1 and 4) and Christians in the United States (Studies 2, 3, and 5). Participants who identified with the lowest levels of religiosity were either excluded from the analysis (Study 1) or excluded from participation in the study (Studies 2–5) because belief in CIG is relevant only to those with a basic level of religiosity (for a similar approach, see Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015; Vishkin et al., 2022). For those who are completely irreligious, belief in CIG is likely to lack sufficiently elaborated cognitive representation, rendering the evaluation of this belief in this population invalid and unreliable (Wu & Dunning, 2018). All five hypotheses were tested in each study. Studies 4–5 were preregistered (see below). For all experiments, we reported all measures, conditions, data exclusions, and how we determined their sample sizes. Data and code can be found at [https://osf.io/tp2s9/?view\\_only=d30f6ccac27a4f1db603561ef3f52875](https://osf.io/tp2s9/?view_only=d30f6ccac27a4f1db603561ef3f52875).

## Study 1

The purpose of Study 1 was to evaluate our hypotheses that belief in CIG violates the individualizing-binding dichotomy of moral domains and test whether such associations hold after controlling for religiosity. To do so, we validated a novel measure assessing belief in CIG. We expected that belief in CIG would be associated with greater endorsement of the moral foundations of harm, fairness and purity, that it would not be associated with greater or lesser endorsement of progressive values, and that these associations would be independent of religiosity.

## Method

**Participants.** Participants were undergraduate students at a large university in Israel who identified as Jewish. Study 1 was exploratory, and therefore, the target sample size was not informed by a power analysis. The sample size was 152 ( $M_{\text{age}} = 22.9$ ; 74% female) after removing 3 participants who did not identify as Jewish and 47 participants who indicated that they are at the lowest level of religiosity on a scale assessing general religiosity from 1 (*not at all*) to 7 (*to a great extent*). This sample size is sufficient for detecting an effect of  $\beta = .22$  at 80% power. There exist numerous recommended practices regarding sample sizes for factor analysis. The sample size meets some recommended practices (e.g., Pett et al., 2003) but does not meet all of them (e.g., Comrey & Lee, 1992), so the results of the factor analysis on the novel measure of belief in CIG may be interpreted with caution.

## Materials

**Moral Foundations.** We assessed endorsement of moral foundations via the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ; Graham et al., 2011). Each of the five moral foundations is assessed via six

**Table 2.** Descriptive Statistics for the Endorsement of Moral Foundations (Studies 1–2).

Moral foundations	Study 1			Study 2		
	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Harm	.41	4.73	0.59	.71	4.69	0.79
Fairness	.50	4.57	0.59	.69	4.48	0.73
Loyalty	.61	4.15	0.68	.69	3.61	0.87
Authority	.65	3.76	0.80	.73	4.10	0.87
Purity	.65	3.74	0.89	.86	4.25	1.12
Progressivism	-	0.77	0.82	-	0.60	0.93

items. For half the items within each foundation, participants are asked to indicate to what extent various considerations are relevant to their judgment of whether something is right or wrong, on a six-point scale from 1 (*not at all relevant*) to 6 (*extremely relevant*). For the other half of items within each foundation, participants are asked to indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with various statements, on a six-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). We adapted a translation of the MFQ from its website (<https://moralfoundations.org/questionnaires/>). Internal consistency was acceptable for some, but not for all, subscales (see Table 2), which is a limitation of the MFQ that has been noted by others (Harper & Rhodes, 2021). A score for progressivism is computed by subtracting the average of the foundations assessing the moral codes of community and divinity from the average of the foundations assessing the moral code of autonomy (<https://www.MoralFoundations.org>; see, e.g., Clark et al., 2017).

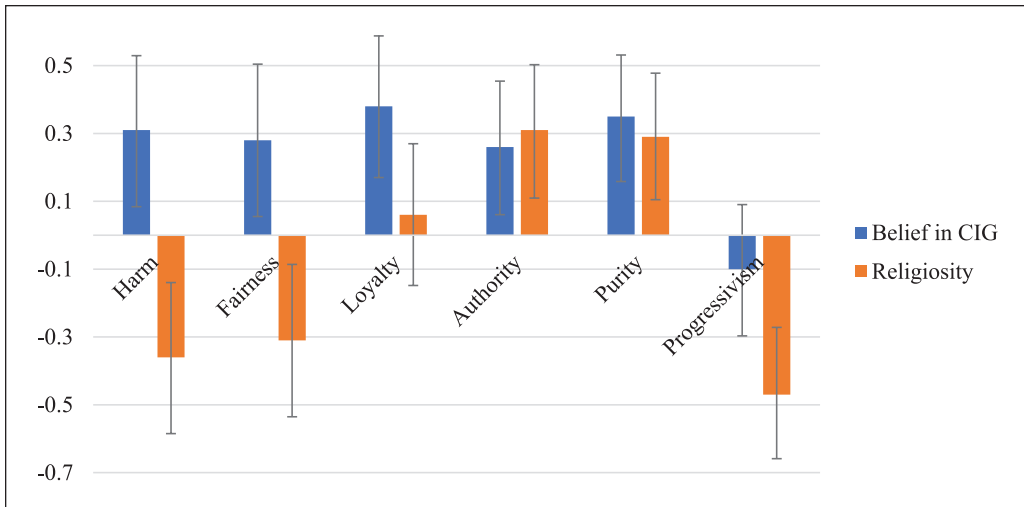
**Religiosity.** Hundreds of measures of religiosity have been developed or used in recent years (Hill & Edwards, 2013). We followed the advice of Hill and Edwards (2013) and assessed religiosity via the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI; Worthington et al., 2003). The scale consists of 10 items (e.g., “My religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life”;  $\alpha = .95$ ) completed on a five-point scale from 1 (*not at all true of me*) to 5 (*totally true of me*). The sample was moderately religious ( $M = 2.40$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ).

**Belief in CIG.** We constructed 15 face-valid items to assess belief in CIG (e.g., “Within every human is something Godly”; for all items, see Supplementary Materials). Participants were asked to indicate their agreement with each item on a scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Validation of the scale is described below.

**Procedure.** Participants completed the MFQ, then reported their religiosity, and then reported their endorsement of the belief in CIG. Finally, they reported demographic information. For exploratory purposes, additional measures were included before and after the MFQ, including personal values (Schwartz et al., 2012), judgments of bodily purity, attitudes toward animal rights (Wuensch et al., 2002), forgiveness (McCullough et al., 2006), the big five (Donnellan et al., 2006), and attitudes toward discrimination. The associations between these measures and belief in CIG are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

**Results**

**Validation of Scale Assessing Belief in CIG.** First, we sought to validate the scale we developed for assessing belief in CIG. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis (for item-level statistics, see Supplementary Materials). A single factor explained 58.9% of the variance (eigenvalue =



**Figure 1.** Regression Coefficients for Belief in CIG and Religiosity (Entered Simultaneously) Predicting Each Moral Foundation (Study 1).

Note. Bands represent 95% confidence intervals.

8.84), and the next factor explained only 8.4% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.26), suggesting that this belief is a unitary construct—an assessment confirmed by visual inspection of the scree plot. Next, following the work by Worthington Everett et al. (2003), we retained items with loadings of .60 or higher on this factor. This led to the removal of Items 4 and 14, leaving 13 items ( $\alpha = .96$ ). Subsequent analyses were conducted on this 13-item scale ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ), although results remain unchanged when including all 15 items. Convergent validity was demonstrated via the high correlation between belief in CIG and religiosity,  $r = .71$ ,  $p < .001$ .

**Belief in CIG and Endorsement of Moral Foundations.** As we sought to tease apart the contributions of each of these constructs to the endorsement of moral foundations, we regressed each moral foundation on both belief in CIG and religiosity. Results revealed that belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of each moral foundation (see Figure 1). Critically, belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of harm (supporting H1;  $\beta = .31$ ,  $p = .007$ , 95% CI = [.084, .529]) and fairness (supporting H2;  $\beta = .28$ ,  $p = .015$ , 95% CI = [.055, .504]), whereas religiosity predicted weaker endorsement of these foundations (harm:  $\beta = -.36$ ,  $p = .002$ , 95% CI = [-.585, -.140]; fairness:  $\beta = -.31$ ,  $p = .007$ , 95% CI = [-.535, -.086]). Belief in CIG also predicted greater endorsement of purity (supporting H3;  $\beta = .35$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.158, .531]). Unexpectedly, belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of authority and was a stronger predictor of the loyalty foundation than religiosity (not supporting H4; authority and belief in CIG:  $\beta = .26$ ,  $p = .011$ , 95% CI = [.061, .454]; loyalty and belief in CIG:  $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.170, .588]). Overall, whereas religiosity was related to lower endorsement of progressivism ( $\beta = -.47$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [-.659, -.272]), belief in CIG was unrelated to progressivism ( $\beta = -.10$ ,  $p = .294$ , 95% CI = [-.297, .090]), supporting H5 and indicating that the latter's association with moral foundation does not fall neatly on the individualizing-binding distinction.

## Discussion

Despite being highly correlated, belief in CIG predicted the endorsement of moral foundations differently than did religiosity when the two were entered as simultaneous predictors of moral

foundations. In particular, belief in CIG predicted higher endorsement of all moral foundations, and predicted harm and fairness in the opposite direction of religiosity. In line with our hypotheses, belief in CIG was unrelated to progressivism and was not clearly associated with the moral codes of autonomy and divinity more than the moral codes of community. As such, Study 1 provides proof of concept that belief in CIG uniquely predicts the endorsement of all moral foundations, rather than just the individualizing foundations or the binding foundations. However, it is not yet clear whether belief in CIG affects the prioritization of some moral codes (i.e., autonomy, divinity) more than others (i.e., community).

## Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to test hypotheses in another sample. The biblical creation myth appears in the book of Genesis, which is canonical in both Judaism and Christianity. If belief in CIG influences the endorsement of moral foundations, then belief in CIG should uniquely contribute to the endorsement of moral foundations in a Christian sample as well.

## Method

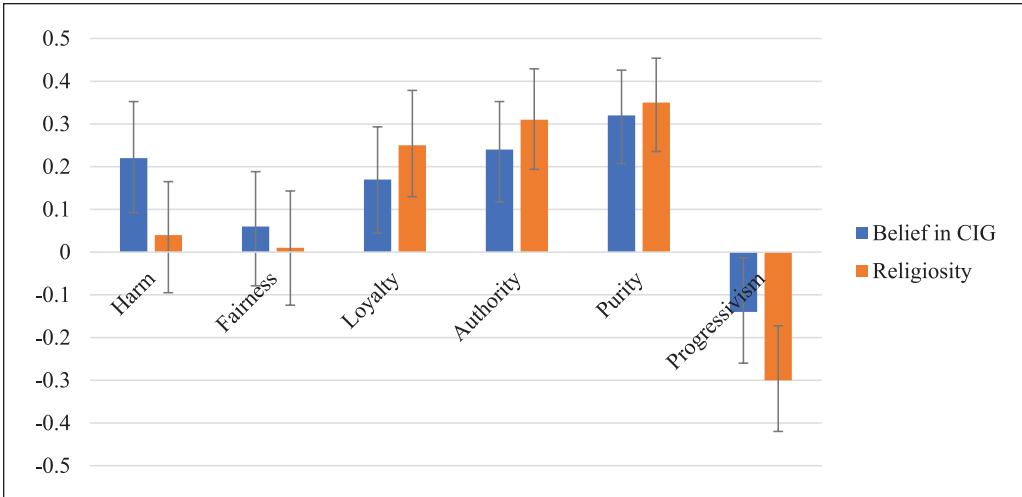
**Participants.** Participants were recruited for the study from Amazon's Mechanical Turk. They were preselected for living in the United States, identifying as Christian, and being at least moderately religious by marking 3 or higher on a scale assessing religiosity from 1 (*not religious at all*) to 5 (*the center of my life*).<sup>1</sup> A power analysis based on the smallest hypothesized regression coefficient from Study 1 ( $\beta = .28$ ) revealed that 95% power would be achieved with a sample size of 155. Given that the sample in Study 2 is different than in Study 1, we sampled nearly twice that – 303 participants. Two participants were removed for failing an instructional attention check (Oppenheimer et al., 2009), leaving in 301 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 40.3$ ; 65% female). This sample size is sufficient for detecting an effect of  $\beta = .16$  at 80% power and meets several recommended practices for sample sizes in a factor analysis (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Pett et al., 2003).

**Materials.** Participants completed the same measures as in Study 1, including the MFQ to assess endorsement of moral foundations (see Table 2 for internal consistency, means, and standard deviations for each foundation), the RCI to assess religiosity ( $M = 3.23$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ,  $\alpha = .96$ ), and the 13 items of the belief in CIG scale from Study 1, whose validation in this sample is described below.

**Procedure.** As in Study 1, participants completed the MFQ, then reported their endorsement of the belief in CIG, and then reported their religiosity. Finally, they reported demographic information. Additional measures were included before and after the MFQ. The associations between these measures and belief in CIG are reported in the Supplementary Materials.

## Results

**Validation of Scale Assessing Belief in CIG.** First, we sought to validate the scale assessing belief in CIG. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis rather than a confirmatory factor analysis because Study 2 was conducted on a different sample than Study 1. A single factor explained 56.1% of the variance (eigenvalue = 7.30), and the next factor explained only 9.4% of the variance (eigenvalue = 1.22), suggesting that this belief is a unitary construct—an assessment confirmed by visual inspection of the scree plot. Next, following the procedure from Study 1, we retained items with loadings of .60 or higher. This removed items 8, 12, and 15, leaving 10 items ( $\alpha = .94$ ). Subsequent analyses were conducted on this 10-item scale ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ). Results remain unchanged when including all 13 items, with one exception noted below.



**Figure 2.** Regression Coefficients for Belief in CIG and Religiosity (Entered Simultaneously) Predicting Each Moral Foundation (Study 2).

Note. Bands represent 95% confidence intervals.

**Belief in CIG and Endorsement of Moral Foundations.** Belief in CIG and religiosity were highly correlated,  $r = .53$ ,  $p < .001$ . As in Study 1, we sought to assess the unique contribution of belief in CIG to the endorsement of moral foundations above and beyond religiosity by regressing each moral foundation on both belief in CIG and religiosity (see Figure 2). Results revealed that belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of each moral foundation, including harm (supporting H1;  $\beta = .22$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.093, .352]), purity (supporting H3;  $\beta = .32$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.207, .426]), loyalty and authority (not supporting H4; loyalty:  $\beta = .17$ ,  $p = .008$ , 95% CI = [.045, .293]; authority:  $\beta = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [.117, .353]), except for fairness (not supporting H2;  $\beta = .06$ ,  $p = .421$ , 95% CI = [-.079, .188]). Critically, a comparison of intervals reveals that belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of harm than did religiosity ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $p = .597$ , 95% CI = [-.095, .165]), whereas both predicted endorsement of the other moral foundations to the same extent. In turn, a comparison of confidence intervals reveals that religiosity predicted more negative endorsement of progressivism ( $\beta = -.30$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = [-.420, -.173]) than belief in CIG ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p = .030$ , 95% CI = [-.260, -.013]), partially supporting H5.<sup>2</sup>

## Discussion

Despite being highly correlated with religiosity, belief in CIG predicted the endorsement of moral foundations differently and effectively violated the individualizing-binding dichotomy. In particular, when entered as simultaneous predictors, belief in CIG not only predicted greater endorsement of the binding moral foundations, including purity (supporting H3), loyalty, and authority (not supporting H4), as did religiosity, but also predicted greater endorsement of harm (supporting H1)—which religiosity did not predict. Neither predicted fairness (not supporting H2). As a result, belief in CIG was negatively associated with progressivism to a weaker extent than religiosity (partially supporting H5).

Together, Studies 1–2 reveal that belief in CIG uniquely explains endorsement of moral foundations. Contrary to our hypotheses, belief in CIG was not clearly associated with the moral codes of autonomy and divinity more than the moral code of community. However, teasing apart

belief in CIG from religiosity is difficult given their high multicollinearity. Consequently, in Studies 3–5, we manipulated the salience of belief in CIG to investigate whether it increases the endorsement of some foundations more than others.

### Study 3

The purpose of Study 3 was to investigate how endorsement of different foundations is influenced by the salience of belief in CIG. We did so by first measuring moral foundations, then increasing the salience of belief in CIG, and finally, measuring moral foundations again. This design allowed us to test how increasing the salience of belief in CIG will change the endorsement of moral foundations. We expected that salience of the belief in CIG would increase the endorsement of the individualizing foundations (i.e., harm and fairness) and of purity, and that it would do so relative to the communal foundations (i.e., loyalty and authority), without being associated with the endorsement of progressive values.

### Method

**Participants.** The target sample size was 200, which is sufficient for detecting an effect size of  $d = .20$  in a paired-samples  $t$ -test (the simplest of the analyses that were run) at 80% power. We preselected MTurk participants that reside in the United States, identified as Christian, and indicated that religion is at least moderately important to them, as in Study 2. 199 participants completed the survey. Of the 199 participants, 10 failed the attention check, leaving in 189 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 39.0$ ; 55% female).

**Procedure.** Participants first completed the MFQ from their own perspective (for descriptive statistics, see Table 3). We manipulated belief in CIG similarly to manipulations of belief in God in other studies (Ginges et al., 2016; Pasek et al., 2020, 2023; White et al., 2019) by increasing the salience of belief in CIG in two ways. We first gave the following query:

Many believe that people are created in the image of God. This idea means different things to different people. Please write one or two sentences regarding what this idea means to you.

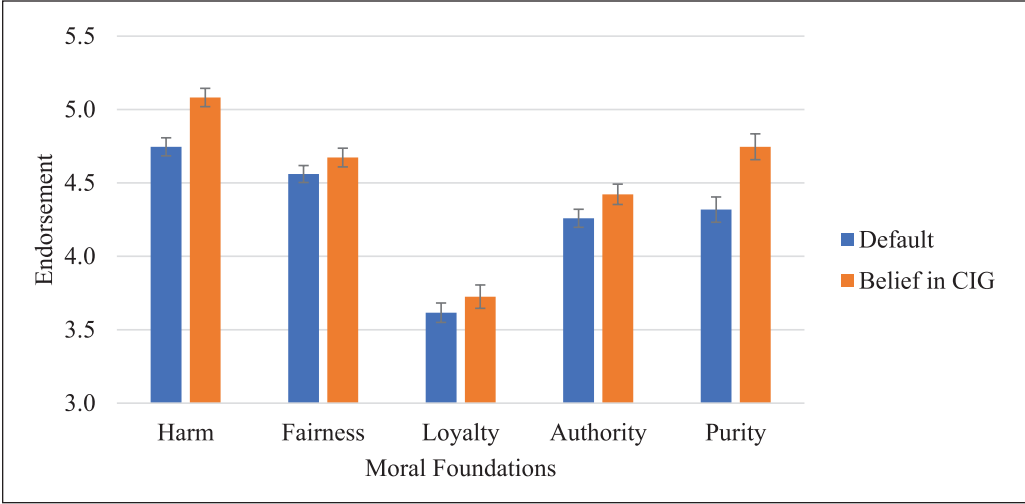
All participants wrote coherent responses. Subsequently, participants were asked to complete the MFQ again, except that this time they were asked to do so as they “keep in mind the idea that people are created in the image of God”. Finally, they completed the measure of religiosity from Studies 1–2, the 10-item measure assessing belief in CIG validated in Study 2, and a demographic questionnaire, none of which were analyzed for this investigation. At the end of the survey, participants completed an attention check in which they were presented with seven questionnaire items and asked to indicate which three of the seven questions they answered in the survey. The likelihood of passing the attention check by guessing is less than 3%.

### Results

One item from the purity dimension of the MFQ was not used because of its similarity with the manipulation by referring explicitly to God (“Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of”). Results remained unchanged when including this item. To test whether the salience of belief in CIG increases endorsement of harm and purity, relative to other moral foundations, we ran a within-participants Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on perspective (baseline vs. belief in CIG) and moral foundation (harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity). A main effect emerged for perspective,  $F(1, 188) = 57.77, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .24$ , such that participants generally

**Table 3.** Descriptive Statistics for the Endorsement of Moral Foundations (Study 3).

Moral foundation	Baseline perspective			CIG perspective			Correlation between perspectives
	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	$\alpha$	$M$	$SD$	
Harm	.75	4.75	0.84	.76	5.08	0.86	.74
Fairness	.73	4.56	0.80	.71	4.67	0.87	.69
Loyalty	.73	3.62	0.91	.77	3.72	1.09	.79
Authority	.73	4.26	0.84	.73	4.42	0.95	.81
Purity	.87	4.32	1.18	.87	4.75	1.21	.83
Progressivism	-	0.59	0.99	-	0.58	0.98	.81



**Figure 3.** Endorsement of Moral Foundations From One’s Own Perspective Versus From the Perspective of the Belief in CIG (Study 3).  
Note. Bands represent standard errors. The full range of the Y-axis is from 1 to 6.

endorsed moral foundations to a greater extent when belief in CIG was salient, relative to their own perspective (see Figure 3). In addition, a main effect emerged for moral foundations,  $F(4, 185) = 77.47, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .29$ , such that some moral foundations were endorsed to a greater extent than other moral foundations. The main effects were qualified by the expected perspective  $\times$  moral foundation interaction,  $F(4, 185) = 13.12, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , indicating that the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of some moral foundation more than others (see Figure 3).

To break down the influence of the salience of belief in CIG on each moral foundation, we ran a paired-samples  $t$ -test on perspective (baseline vs. belief in CIG) for each moral foundation. When belief in CIG was salient, people endorsed to a greater extent: the moral foundation of harm,  $t(188) = 7.53, p < .001, d = 1.10$ ; the moral foundation of fairness,  $t(188) = 2.34, p = .020, d = 0.34$ ; the moral foundation of loyalty,  $t(188) = 2.25, p = .026, d = 0.33$ ; the moral foundation of authority,  $t(188) = 3.95, p < .001, d = 0.58$ ; and the moral foundation of purity,  $t(188) = 8.46, p < .001, d = 1.23$ . A comparison of these effect sizes reveals that the interaction between perspective and moral foundations reflected a greater increase in the endorsement of

harm and purity compared with fairness, loyalty, and authority (supporting H1, H3, and H4; not supporting H2, but see below). In addition, the salience of belief in CIG did not affect greater or lesser endorsement of progressivism (individualizing foundations minus binding foundations) relative to the baseline perspective (supporting H5),  $t(188) = -0.21, p = .83, d = 0.03$ .

The failure to confirm our hypotheses with regard to fairness gave us pause. When reviewing the items assessing fairness, we found that they cover the domains of equality and justice. We had expected that the salience of belief in CIG would affect the endorsement of the moral foundation of fairness due to its link with equality because CIG includes the belief that *all* humans were created in God's image. Therefore, we split the items assessing fairness into the two items that assess endorsement of equality ("Whether or not some people were treated differently than others"; "I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing") versus the other four items which assess justice (e.g., "Justice is the most important requirement for a society"). When belief in CIG was salient, people endorsed the equality items of the moral foundation of fairness to a greater extent ( $M = 4.14, SD = 1.23$ ) than from their own perspective ( $M = 3.72, SD = 1.15$ ),  $t(188) = 6.65, p < .001, d = 0.97$  (consistent with H2). However, there was no significant difference in the endorsement of the justice items from the perspective of belief in CIG ( $M = 4.94, SD = 0.92$ ) versus from their own perspective ( $M = 4.98, SD = 0.82$ ), although the trend was in the opposite direction,  $t(188) = -0.77, p = .44, d = -0.11$ .

Overall, a comparison of the effect sizes reveals that the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of the foundations of harm, purity, and the equality subscale of the fairness foundation (mean  $d = 1.10$ ) to a greater extent than the foundations of loyalty, authority, and the justice subscale of the fairness foundation (mean  $d = 0.27$ ).

## Discussion

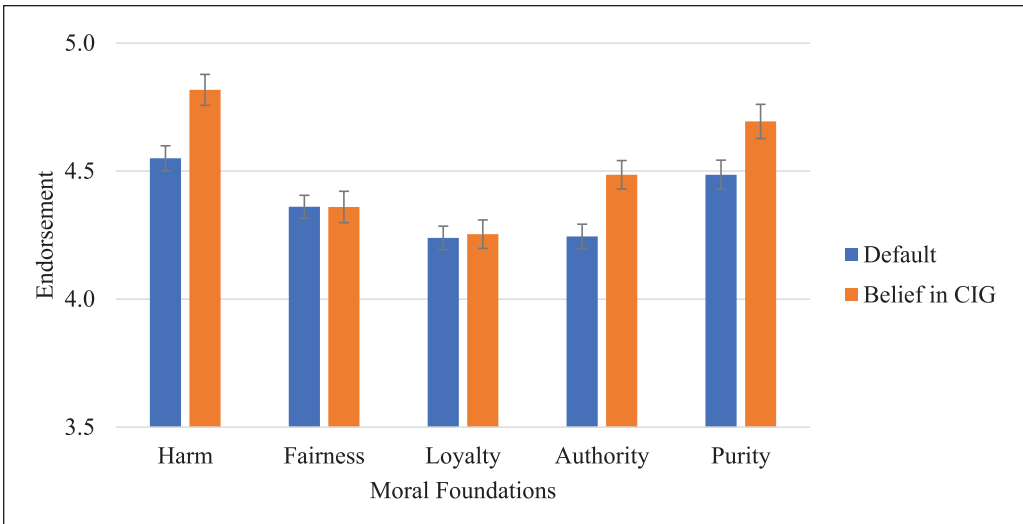
The Salience of Belief in CIG increased the endorsement of all moral foundations, replicating the findings from Studies 1 to 2. Furthermore, the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of harm and purity more than it increased the endorsement of loyalty, authority, and fairness. Moreover, a preliminary analysis revealed that within the moral foundation of fairness, the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of items reflecting judgments of equality, but not of justice. Overall, the salience of belief in CIG was associated with the moral codes of autonomy and divinity, but not community, demonstrating that it violates the distinction between individualizing and binding moral domains.

## Study 4

In Study 4, we sought to test whether our findings on Christians in Study 3 extend to the members of a different religious affiliation—Jews—in a preregistered study ([https://aspredicted.org/WGX\\_QXM](https://aspredicted.org/WGX_QXM)). As in Study 3, we examined whether making salient the belief in CIG would increase the endorsement of harm and purity relative to the communal foundations, and whether it would increase the endorsement of equality, but not of justice, in the fairness foundation.

## Method

**Participants.** The target sample size was the same as in Study 3, and we intentionally over-recruited given our previous knowledge of data quality in the panel. We selected Jewish residents of Israel via an online panel (<https://www.ipanel.co.il>) whose religious affiliation was not secular (i.e., traditional, religious, or ultra-orthodox). 250 participants completed the survey. Of them, 51 participants failed the attention check and 4 participants wrote nonsensical responses in response to the prompt, leaving 195 participants ( $M_{age} = 34.0$ ; 61% female).



**Figure 4.** Endorsement of Moral Foundations From One's Own Perspective Versus From the Perspective of the Belief in CIG (Study 4).

Note. Bands represent standard errors. The full range of the Y-axis is from 1 to 6.

**Procedure.** The procedure was identical to the procedure of Study 3.

## Results

As in Study 3 (and specified in the preregistration), we ran the analyses without the purity item which explicitly refers to God. To test whether the salience of belief in CIG increases the endorsement of purity and the individualizing moral foundations, relative to the communal moral foundations, we ran a within-participants ANOVA on perspective (baseline vs. belief in CIG) and moral foundation (harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity). A main effect emerged for perspective,  $F(1, 194) = 17.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .08$ , such that participants endorsed moral foundations to a greater extent from the perspective of belief in CIG relative to their own perspective (see Figure 4). In addition, a main effect emerged for moral foundations,  $F(4, 191) = 25.11, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .12$ , such that some moral foundations were endorsed to a greater extent than other moral foundations. The main effects were qualified by the expected interaction,  $F(4, 191) = 15.50, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .07$ , indicating that the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of some moral foundation more than others (see Table 4).

To break down the influence of the salience of belief in CIG on each moral foundation, we ran a paired-samples *t*-test on perspective (baseline vs. belief in CIG) for each moral foundation. When belief in CIG was salient, people endorsed to a greater extent than the moral foundation of harm,  $t(194) = 6.23, p < .001, d = 0.90$ ; the moral foundation of authority,  $t(194) = 5.50, p < .001, d = 0.79$ ; and the moral foundation of purity,  $t(194) = 4.27, p < .001, d = 0.61$ . Neither the moral foundations of fairness,  $t(194) = -0.02, p = .986, d = 0.003$ , nor the moral foundation of loyalty,  $t(194) = 0.33, p = .745, d = 0.05$ , was endorsed to a greater extent when belief in CIG was made salient. A comparison of the effect sizes reveals that the interaction between perspective and moral foundations reflected a greater increase in the endorsement of harm, purity, and authority, compared to fairness and loyalty (supporting H1 and H2; inconsistent with H3; not supporting H2, but see below). In addition, the salience of belief in CIG was not related to greater or lesser endorsement of progressive moral foundations relative to the baseline perspective (supporting H5),  $t(194) = 0.64, p = .524, d = 0.09$ .

As in Study 3 (but not included in the preregistration of Study 4), we broke down the fairness foundations into two subscales: an equality subscale and a justice subscale. When belief in CIG

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics for the Endorsement of Moral Foundations (Study 4).

Moral foundations	Baseline perspective			CIG perspective			Correlation
	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Harm	.41	4.55	0.68	.66	4.82	0.85	.71
Fairness	.41	4.36	0.63	.65	4.36	0.86	.61
Loyalty	.40	4.24	0.65	.51	4.25	0.78	.63
Authority	.36	4.24	0.66	.51	4.48	0.77	.64
Purity	.60	4.48	0.80	.69	4.69	0.94	.70
Progressivism	-	0.14	0.66	-	0.12	0.70	.76

was salient, people endorsed the equality items of the moral foundation of fairness to a greater extent ( $M = 3.58$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) than from their own perspective ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.97$ ),  $t(194) = 2.85$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $d = 0.41$  (partially supporting H2). However, there was no significant difference in the endorsement of the justice items from the perspective of belief in CIG ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 0.88$ ) versus from their own perspective ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ), although the trend was in the opposite direction,  $t(194) = -1.81$ ,  $p = .072$ ,  $d = -0.26$ .

A comparison of the effect sizes reveals that the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of the foundations of harm, purity, and the equality subscale of the fairness foundation (mean  $d = 0.64$ ) to a greater extent than the foundations of loyalty, authority, and the justice subscale of the fairness foundation (mean  $d = 0.20$ ).

**Discussion**

The results of Study 4 provide a preregistered replication of Study 3 on a different population and show that the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of harm, authority, and purity but not of loyalty. Moreover, within the moral foundation of fairness, the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of equality, but not of justice. The salience of belief in CIG did not increase the endorsement of loyalty but did increase the endorsement of authority to a greater extent than we expected. The salience of belief in CIG was not associated with progressivism. Overall, the salience of belief in CIG was associated with greater endorsement of the moral codes of autonomy and divinity, compared to one of the foundations of community.

**Study 5**

In addition to increasing the salience of the belief that people are created in the image of God, the manipulations in Studies 3–4 likely increased the salience of belief in God more generally. Might the greater endorsement of the individualizing foundations and of purity in Studies 3–4 be driven by the greater salience of belief in God, rather than the particular belief in CIG? The purpose of Study 5 was to test this question in a preregistered study ([https://aspredicted.org/BT5\\_8VX](https://aspredicted.org/BT5_8VX)). We also preregistered our plan to replicate findings from Studies 3 to 4, including the influence of belief in CIG on judgments of equality versus justice within the fairness foundation. The design was similar to that of Studies 3–4, except that we added another between-participants condition: the salience of belief in CIG versus the salience of belief in God.

**Method**

**Participants.** Given the addition of another between-participants condition, we set the target sample size as twice that of Study 3—400 participants. We preselected participants on the online

survey platform Prolific who reside in the United States, identified as Christian, and indicated that they participate in public or private religious activities (or both), and excluded those who participate neither in public religious activities nor in private religious activities. 26 participants failed the attention check but none wrote nonsensical responses (the 2 preregistered exclusion criteria), leaving in 374 participants ( $M_{\text{age}} = 31.8$ ; 52% female).

**Procedure.** The procedure was identical to the procedure of Study 3, except for a manipulation of the salience of belief in God in one between-participants condition. The overall design is a 5 (moral foundations, within-participant) by 2 (baseline vs. belief, within-participant) by 2 (belief type: CIG vs. God, between-participants). The query meant to induce the salience of belief in God was similar to the query meant to induce the salience of belief in CIG and read as follows:

Many believe in the existence of God. This belief means different things to different people. Please write one or two sentences regarding what this belief means to you.

Subsequently, participants were asked to complete the MFQ again, except that this time they were asked to do so as they “keep in mind the belief that God exists.”

## Results

**Belief in CIG.** As in Studies 3–4 (and specified in the preregistration), we ran the analyses without the purity item which explicitly refers to God. First, we sought to replicate findings from Studies 3 to 4 by testing whether the salience of belief in CIG increases endorsement of the individualizing foundations of harm and fairness, and the foundation of purity, relative to other moral foundations. To do so, we ran a within-participants ANOVA on perspective (baseline vs. belief in CIG) and moral foundation (harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity) only on the participants in the *belief in CIG* condition. A main effect emerged for perspective,  $F(1, 183) = 31.14, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .15$ , such that participants endorsed moral foundations to a greater extent from the perspective of belief in CIG relative to their own perspective (see Table 5), as in Studies 3–4. In addition, a main effect emerged for moral foundations,  $F(4, 180) = 153.03, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .46$ , such that some moral foundations were endorsed to a greater extent than other moral foundations. The main effects were qualified by the expected interaction,  $F(4, 180) = 18.39, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$ , indicating that making salient the belief of CIG increased the endorsement of some moral foundation more than others.

To break down the influence of the salience of belief in CIG on each moral foundation, we ran a paired-samples *t*-test on perspective (Baseline vs. belief in CIG) for each moral foundation. When belief in CIG was salient, people endorsed to a greater extent than the moral foundation of harm,  $t(183) = 8.92, p < .001, d = 1.32$ ; the moral foundation of fairness,  $t(183) = 2.28, p = .024, d = 0.34$ ; the moral foundation of authority,  $t(183) = 2.37, p = .019, d = 0.35$ ; and the moral foundation of purity,  $t(183) = 7.08, p < .001, d = 1.05$ . The moral foundation of loyalty was not endorsed to a greater extent when belief in CIG was made salient,  $t(183) = 1.51, p = .132, d = 0.22$ . A comparison of the effect sizes reveals that the interaction between perspective and moral foundations reflected a greater increase in the endorsement of harm and purity, compared with fairness, loyalty, and authority (supporting H1, H3, and H4; not supporting H2, but see below). In addition, the salience of belief in CIG was not related to greater or lesser endorsement of progressive moral foundations relative to the baseline perspective (supporting H5),  $t(183) = 0.54, p = .59, d = 0.08$ .

**Breaking Down the Fairness Foundation.** As in Studies 3–4, and this time preregistered, we broke down the fairness foundation into an equality subscale and a justice subscale. When belief in CIG was salient, people endorsed the equality items of the moral foundation of

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics for the Endorsement of Moral Foundations (Study 5).

Moral foundation	Baseline perspective <sup>a</sup>			CIG perspective			God perspective		
	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$\alpha$	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Harm	.65	4.71	0.72	.77	5.09	0.80	.77	4.98	0.83
Fairness	.62	4.53	0.67	.76	4.61	0.86	.75	4.55	0.86
Loyalty	.64	3.34	0.83	.77	3.44	1.08	.73	3.43	1.02
Authority	.67	3.88	0.80	.74	4.03	0.97	.75	4.00	0.98
Purity	.73	3.96	0.98	.81	4.39	1.10	.87	4.27	1.27
Progressivism	-	0.89	0.89	-	0.90	0.96	-	0.86	1.04

<sup>a</sup>Pooled across both belief conditions.

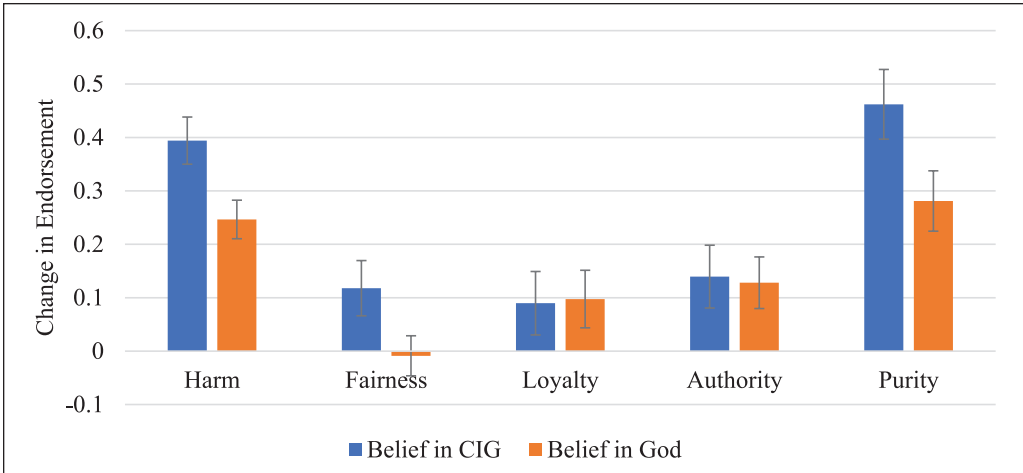
fairness to a greater extent ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.06$ ) than from their own perspective ( $M = 3.78$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ),  $t(183) = 5.32$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $d = 0.79$  (partially supporting H2). However, there was no significant difference in the endorsement of the justice items from the perspective of belief in CIG ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) versus from their own perspective ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ),  $t(183) = -0.10$ ,  $p = .92$ ,  $d = -0.01$ .

Overall, a comparison of the effect sizes reveals that the salience of belief in CIG increased the endorsement of the foundations of harm, purity, and the equality subscale of the fairness foundation (mean  $d = 1.05$ ) to a greater extent than the foundations of loyalty, authority, and the justice subscale of the fairness foundation (mean  $d = 0.19$ ).

**Belief in CIG Versus Belief in God.** Is the greater endorsement of the individualizing foundations and of purity in Studies 3–4 unique to belief in CIG, or driven by belief in God? To test this question, we conducted an ANOVA on perspective (baseline vs. belief, within-participant), belief type (CIG vs. God, between-participants), and moral foundation (harm, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity; within-participant). A significant three-way interaction emerged,  $F(4, 369) = 2.49$ ,  $p = .042$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .007$ , indicating that the two types of beliefs exerted different impacts on the change in endorsement of the moral foundations. Breaking this down, Figure 5 presents the change in the endorsement of each moral foundation following the increased belief salience. Compared to the salience of belief in God, the salience of belief in CIG led to greater increases in the endorsement of the foundations of harm, fairness, and purity, supporting our hypotheses that effects are driven by belief in CIG and not by a more general belief in God.

To capture the differential influence of the two beliefs on the endorsement of moral foundations, we conducted a mixed ANOVA for each moral foundation, on both perspective (baseline vs. belief, within-participant) and belief type (CIG vs. God, between-participants), following the preregistered analysis. The two-way interactions were significant for harm,  $F(1, 372) = 6.72$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ ; fairness,  $F(1, 372) = 3.97$ ,  $p = .047$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ ; and purity,  $F(1, 372) = 4.41$ ,  $p = .036$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .01$ . The two-way interactions were not significant for loyalty,  $F(1, 372) = 0.01$ ,  $p = .92$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .000$ , and authority,  $F(1, 372) = 0.02$ ,  $p = .88$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .000$ . Within the fairness foundation, the two-way interaction was significant for the equality subscale,  $F(1, 372) = 6.79$ ,  $p = .010$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .02$ , but not the justice subscale,  $F(1, 372) = 1.22$ ,  $p = .270$ ,  $\eta_p^2 = .003$ , consistent with the finding that belief in CIG influences the equality subscale of the fairness foundation but not the justice subscale of the fairness foundation.

These findings indicate that the greater endorsement of harm, fairness, and purity when belief in CIG is salient is not due to the greater salience of belief in God.



**Figure 5.** Change in the Endorsement of Moral Foundations After Belief Salience Versus at Baseline (Study 5).

*Note.* Bands represent standard errors.

## Discussion

The results of Study 5 provide evidence that the stronger endorsement of the moral foundations of harm, purity, and the equality subscale of fairness following the salience of belief in CIG cannot be accounted for by a general increase in the salience of a belief in God. It also provides a preregistered replication of Studies 3–4 by showing that belief in CIG was associated with greater endorsement of the moral codes of autonomy and divinity, compared with the moral code of community. In particular, belief in CIG increases the endorsement of harm and purity, and the endorsement of equality within the moral foundation of fairness. Making belief in CIG salient did not increase the endorsement of loyalty and authority to the same extent as the other foundations, and belief in CIG was not associated with progressivism.

## General Discussion

Standard approaches to the moral domain, based primarily on the psychologically unique profiles of college-educated individuals in a number of Western countries (Henrich et al., 2010; Rad et al., 2018), have typically distinguished between individualizing moral domains and binding moral domains (Graham et al., 2011). Although past findings showed that religiosity is associated with more endorsement of binding foundations versus individualizing foundations, we find that among religious participants in Israel and the United States, the endorsement of a specific belief, that humans were created in the image of God, leads to the increased endorsement of the individualizing foundations and the purity foundation, but not the communal foundations. Specifically, across two correlational studies on Jews in Israel and Christians in the United States (Studies 1–2), we find that the belief that people are created in the image of God (belief in CIG) is associated with the endorsement of moral foundations generally, including both individualizing and binding foundations. These findings confirmed hypothesized associations between belief in CIG and harm (H1), fairness (H2; only in Study 1), purity (H3), and overall progressivism (H5). However, they did not confirm the hypothesis that belief in CIG should be more weakly associated with the communal foundations (loyalty and authority; H4). Three experimental studies on Christians in the United

States and Jews in Israel (Studies 3–5) gave greater clarity, showing that making this belief salient led to the endorsement of moral foundations in line with all the hypotheses: belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of the individualizing domain (comprising the foundations of harm and fairness—and particularly items related to equality, but not justice), and part of the binding domain (the foundation of purity), but not another part of the binding domain (the moral code of community, comprising the foundations of loyalty and authority). Thus, belief in CIG predicts the endorsement of moral foundations in a manner that violates the individualizing-binding dichotomy. Despite the religious basis of belief in CIG, findings were not accounted for by religiosity (Studies 1–2) or by belief in God (Study 5).

Our findings complement recent findings which show that the structure of the moral domain is culturally dependent and idiosyncratic (Atari et al., 2020, 2023), with moral foundations clustering differently in different cultures. For instance, the communal moral foundations (loyalty and authority) are more closely associated with the individualizing foundations in Iran, compared with the United States (Atari et al., 2020). Moreover, Atari et al. (2023) use a six-dimensional model of the moral domain to show that the structures of morality are culture-specific across more than a dozen populations. The present investigation extends that line of work in understanding cultural variation in the structure of the moral domain in two ways. First, none of Atari et al.'s culture-specific models show purity tightly linked with the individualizing foundation, as we show in this investigation. Furthermore, beyond demonstrating cultural idiosyncrasy in the structure of the moral domain, it is unclear from that emerging line of research how culturally particular beliefs or worldviews may shape the structure of the moral domain. We bridged that gap by investigating how the endorsement of a particular, core religious belief affects the structure of the moral domain.

Our studies also reveal the importance of an understudied religious belief—that people are created in the image of God. There is a prevalent argument that religion is inconsistent with, or even opposes, human rights (e.g., Hitchens, 2007). Our work suggests that this is a simplistic view of religion. Although some religious concepts might contradict a modern construal of human rights, other religious concepts, such as belief in CIG, may support and promote some human rights.

## Limitations and Future Directions

The findings in the present investigation contain several limitations. The experimental manipulations are explicit and are therefore susceptible to experimental demand. In addition, the measures of the dependent variable are based on self-report. Future work can overcome these limitations using subtler methods to manipulate the salience of belief in CIG and by assessing behavior.

One unexpected finding which emerged consistently in the experimental investigations (Studies 3–5) was that, within the fairness foundation, belief in CIG predicted greater endorsement of items relating to equality, but not items relating to justice. Although we did not expect to find this distinction *a priori*, our reasoning regarding why belief in CIG should relate to fairness was explicitly about how belief in CIG implies that individuals have inherent and equal worth. The distinction we found within the fairness domain thus fits our *a priori* reasoning. We note that different approaches to mapping the moral domain have characterized the domain of fairness as multifaceted, both in the context of the five moral foundations and their assessment (Atari et al., 2023; Janoff-Bulman & Carnes, 2013; Skurka et al., 2019) as well as more generally (Meindl et al., 2019; Rai & Fiske, 2011). The measurement instrument used in this investigation may be inadequate to capture psychometrically valid distinctions within the fairness foundation. A recent revision of the MFQ, the MFQ-2, also divided the fairness foundations into two distinct foundations (Atari et al., 2023) and tested for their reliability and validity. Future research can test how belief in CIG affects these two sub-foundations of fairness using the MFQ-2, which has better internal consistency, explanatory power, and generalizability across cultures than the MFQ.

An additional recent development in mapping the nuance of the moral domain pertains to the foundation of purity. Recent work has highlighted that purity has numerous different understandings (Gray et al., 2023), from those which are more related to God to those which are more related to ingesting gross things. In the present investigation, we omitted from the analyses one item in the purity subscale which referred explicitly to God due to semantic overlap with belief in CIG—however, we were mainly interested in how belief in CIG predicts the endorsement of purity in general. Future work can investigate if this belief affects the endorsement of certain aspects of purity more than others.

The present investigation focused on Christians and Jews in the United States and Israel, respectively. To what extent are these findings generalizable to adherents of other religions? The belief that people are created in the image of God is not limited to religions with the particular creation myth which appears in the book of Genesis. For instance, in Hindu texts and traditions, the self (*Atman*) is described as being derived from God (*Brahman*; Halligan, 2014). The Hindu idea that the divine permeates existence led Shweder et al. (1997) to suggest that within this Hindu system of thought, “the dignity of the individual person is also comprehended within the discourse of [the] ethics of divinity” (p. 148). Much as we have shown in this investigation that individual welfare and divinity are intertwined from the perspective of belief in CIG among Christians and Jews, Shweder et al. (1997) suggest the same is true in Hinduism. Future work can investigate whether the findings obtained here generalize to Hindus and to adherents of other religions.

The core religious belief that people are created in the image of God may influence a number of outcomes, such as intergroup behavior. A series of findings show that different aspects of religion are related to more or less parochialism. Whereas participation in communal religious practices and a religious social identity predicts more parochialism, belief in God predicts less parochialism (Ben-Nun Bloom et al., 2015; Ginges et al., 2009; Pasek et al., 2020; J. M. Smith et al., 2022). To the extent that greater parochialism is driven by the communal moral code and lower parochialism is driven by the individualizing moral code, belief in CIG may account for why belief in God predicts less parochialism. Affirming belief in CIG may thus foster greater acceptance of outgroups among religious individuals. Indeed, recent anthropological work has highlighted the novel role that religious beliefs may play in promoting peace initiatives in intractable conflicts (Weiss, 2022). An intriguing question is whether affirming the moral code of divinity, typically considered a foundation which “binds” people to their group, may in fact decrease parochialism among religious individuals by making salient the belief in CIG.

An important implication of understanding how belief in CIG shapes moral judgment is for understanding the antecedents and consequences of the concept of human dignity. The idea of maintaining human dignity as a moral obligation has been central to the formulation of international declarations following both world wars, whose goal was the maintenance of international harmony and the avoidance of further atrocities. Human dignity has been appealed to in the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the American Declaration of the Rights and Duties of Man (1948). The concept of human dignity is, in fact, older and traces its roots to both Roman thought and to the biblical idea that people are created in the image of God (Trinkaus, 1973). Despite the centrality of the concept of human dignity to political and philosophical thought, to the best of our knowledge, it has never been subject to empirical scrutiny. By investigating one of the roots of the concept of human dignity, this investigation provides a point of entry for further investigating how the concept of human dignity shapes moral judgment.

## Conclusion

Theories of the moral domain have distinguished between individualizing and binding moral domains. Our findings demonstrate that a core religious belief, that people are created in the image

of God, predicts the endorsement of the moral domain in a manner that violates the individualizing-binding dichotomy. Relations within the moral domain are thus crucially determined by idiosyncratic belief systems. This perspective invites further exploration into the associations between moral domains, where cultural beliefs and values are integral to the architecture of our moral judgments.

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### Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

### Notes

1. Religiosity means different things in different religions. Among Jews in Israel, those who are not actively religious or partake in religious observance typically identify as completely secular. Meanwhile, among Christians in the United States, it is sufficient to believe in God to think of oneself as religious. Thus, to try and capture the same level of religious observance and activity, we adopted a stricter criterion in Study 2 than in Study 1.
2. When using the full 13 items of the belief in CIG scale, the regression coefficients of belief in CIG and religiosity when predicting progressivism are not outside each other's 95% confidence intervals.

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