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Institutional, Alternative, Distanced, and Secular.

Four Types of (Un)Belief and their Gods

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ABSTRACT
When scholars use mono-method strategies to identify broad religious or secular groups in a population, they often encounter significant problems. Quantitative studies have difficulties in interpreting the groups because of a lack of local knowledge, while qualitative studies often lack generalizability. The present study uses a mixed methods approach combining a representative survey (N=1229) and semi-structured interviews (N=73) to better address these problems. I identify four basic types of (un)belief: Institutionals, Alternatives, Distanced, and Seculars. These types show very different religious/secular beliefs and practices, and significantly differing images of "God." I argue that this typology is more complete than former attempts, since it combines quantitative generalizability with interpretation grounded in qualitative material. An intergenerational perspective shows that the growing "secular" group will, in the future, outnumber the current largest group of "distanced" individuals.

Keywords: Religious milieu, religiosity, spirituality, secularity, fuzzy fidelity, God, mixed methods

INTRODUCTION

Scholars often use mono-method strategies to identify social groups of similar religiosity, spirituality, or secularity (Siegers 2012; Heelas and Woodhead 2004; Höllinger and Tripold 2012).[1] However, mono-method strategies lead to problems. Quantitative studies normally

1. This article draws strongly on work that has been done in very close collaboration with Judith Könemann, Mallory Schneuwly Purdie, Thomas Englberger, Michael Krüggeler and that can be found in Stolz et al. (2016). I thank Inger Furseth and Lene Kühle for comments on earlier versions of this article.

cannot deliver an interpretation in terms of the local knowledge and the cultural practices in use in the group described. Qualitative studies on the other hand lack generalizability and can only with difficulty be systematically compared with other groups or the societal whole. This study uses mixed methods to create a typology of religion/spirituality/secularity that is both representative and whose interpretation is grounded in qualitative data. The key questions of our paper are: What large religious/spiritual/secular groups can be found in Swiss society; how do these different types construct "God(s)," and how do these groups change in size over time? I find four broad types: Institutionals, Alternatives, Distanced, and Seculars. These types differ sociodemographically, structurally, and concerning their religious beliefs and practice. In this article, I specifically focus on their very different images of "God" and on their change in size in intergenerational perspective. This is a companion article to Stolz (forthcoming) where the methodology of our study is developed in more detail. An extended treatment of the results of the study can be found in Stolz et al. (2016). The plan of the paper is as follows: Part one gives the relevant state of the art of typologies of religion/spirituality/secularity; in part two, I describe the (mixed) methods used; part three gives the results, describes the four types of (un)belief and puts them into a diachronic perspective; part four concludes.

STATE OF THE ART

A number of *quantitative studies* construct different "religious/secular types" with the help of quantitative methods such as cluster analysis, latent class analysis, or items measuring religiosity as a basis. The resulting types are then described by comparing them with the help of various items measuring sociodemographics, beliefs, practices, values, and so on. The following three are some especially noteworthy and relatively recent studies.

First, Siegers (2012) conducts a latent class analysis on the basis of the EVS data in 26 European countries. He uses variables measuring both religious beliefs and practices and finds six groups: atheism, religious indifference, alternative spirituality, moderate religiosity, individualist religiosity, and church religiosity. This study shows that alternative spirituality milieus can be found – although of varying sizes – in European countries in general. Secondly, Höllinger and Tripold (2012) use – just as the present study does – an enhanced ISSP data set 2009 in Austria, and they distinguish six groups: Christian core (12%), Christian periphery (25%), Christian and holistic (15%), Holistic core (7%), Holistic periphery (15%), and Non-religious (26%). The typology is built exclusively with items measuring religious practices (frequency of religious attendance, prayer, and holistic milieu practices). The book also gives one of the most convincing descriptions of the holistic milieu to date. Third, Voas (2009) constructs three types with the help of just one variable: religiosity. He distinguishes "conventionally religious," "fuzzy," and "non-religious." Fuzzy fidelity, according to Voas (2009, 155), is a "residual [religious] involvement" and a "casual loyalty to [religious] tradition." His three types are quite close to what I will call "Institutionals," "Distanced" and "Seculars" below. The fascinating aspect of Voas' work is that it proposes a very simple model according to which the types are linked to religious change: Secularization leads societies from situations with majorities of conventionally religious to a pre-

ponderance of fuzzy fidelity, and then to situations in which the bulk of the population is non-religious. According to Voas, the form of how the three types are transformed into each other is very similar in all Western European countries – only the temporal starting point of secularization differs.[2]

Studies such as these are very valuable, but one of their inherent problems is that the groups created cannot always easily be interpreted. Normally, their meaning is constructed from an interpretation of the wording of the items used, against the backdrop of the everyday knowledge of the researcher. This allows only for a very sketchy picture of the groups' cultural practices and their meanings – and it may seriously fail if the researcher does not know the groups well.

In contrast, when *qualitative and historical studies* have described one or more basic types of large religious/spiritual/secular groups or milieus, they have been able to well describe the cultural practices and relevant local knowledge. Thus, researchers have convincingly analyzed Catholic (Altermatt 2009), Evangelical and Fundamentalist (Riesebrodt 2000), Holistic/alternative spirituality (Campbell [1972]1995; Höllinger and Tripold 2012; Bochinger, Engelbrecht, and Gebhart 2009), as well as secular (Cimino and Smith 2014) milieus. However, a possible problem with these studies is that they lack generalizability. It is not clear to what extent the milieus found exist within a given population. Furthermore, in the absence of statistical distributions and correlations, it is not easy to assess to what extent members of the milieus in fact hold the attributes and combinations of attributes suggested by the studies.

What seems to be missing from the literature are studies that systematically combine quantitative and qualitative findings to construct and validate typologies of religious and secular types. One study that shows how this might be accomplished has been presented by Furseth (2006). She combines a representative survey (ISSP data) in Norway with the collection of 72 in-depth life-story interviews. From these 72 interviews, 8 interviews are chosen as particularly typical and interpreted with a holistic content approach, tying the interpretations systematically both to the history of Norway and the comparison of how the interviewees answered ISSP questions against the backdrop of the general population. While this way of analyzing the data is very different from mine, the overall intention – and many of the central results – are strikingly similar to our study.[3]

Before proceeding, I add a terminological note concerning the terms "types," "milieus," and "statistical aggregates." Types and subtypes are, for the purposes of this article, scientific constructs referring to large social groups, regardless of whether these groups are milieus or social aggregates. Milieus can be defined as large social groups of individuals that (a) show similarities concerning their resources and/or culture, (b) have a relatively high level of internal communication, and (c) have a sense of milieu-identity, that is, of who belongs to the milieu and who does not (compare to Schulze's definition (1995, 410)). Religious milieus are milieus that are centrally built around a religious culture; that is, certain religious practices, beliefs, and identity. In contrast to milieus, social aggregates are

2. One of the drawbacks of this model is that alternative spirituality is not taken into consideration.
3. In this state of the art, for lack of space, I do not go into the large (mainly psychological) literature on God images and God concepts. See for an overview: Davis and Moriarty (2013).

large social groups of individuals that may be characterized by structural and/or cultural similarities, but that do not have a heightened internal communication and do not have a sense of a milieu-identity (compare with Esser (2000, 48)). In the typology below, some of the subtypes are milieus, while others are social aggregates.

METHOD

Design

The study used a convergent parallel mixed methods design, combining a representative survey with semi-structured interviews (Creswell and Plano Clark 2010, 77–8).

Population and sampling

The population of the study, both for the survey and the semi-structured interviews, consisted of all persons aged 18+ who reside in Switzerland, who are either of Christian religion or without religion, and who speak German, French or Italian.[4] For the representative survey, a stratified random sampling according to seven major geographical areas was used. The response rate for the face-to-face survey was 46.6%. For the semi-structured interviews, we sampled with a random-quota procedure according to a qualitative sampling plan (Kelle and Kluge 2010, 50). A professional survey institute called households randomly selected from the general telephone register in Switzerland to create the sample. We used quotas according to language region, gender, urban/rural area, and age.

Data collection

The representative survey was conducted in 2008–09 and comprised a total of 1229 face-to-face interviews.[5] The survey consisted of an enhanced ISSP (International Social Survey Program) module 2008 for religion. The 73 semi-structured interviews (mean length: 71 minutes) were conducted face-to-face using a topic guide. At the end of the semi-structured interview, respondents were asked to complete a written questionnaire with selected questions from the quantitative questionnaire.

Comparing the data sets and generalization

The fact that interviewees of the semi-structured interviews also filled out selected questions of the survey allowed us to compare both samples with respect to selected variables. Thus, as can be seen in Table 1, in our qualitative sample, French-speaking individ-

4. Members of non-Christian religions were excluded, since their numbers were too small in the representative survey.
5. Excluding individuals with non-Christian religions leads to N=1186.

uals are (voluntarily) over-represented, while the distributions concerning the variables urban/rural, sex, and age are very similar in the qualitative and quantitative sample. The distribution of the four-fold typology also turns out to be very similar in the quantitative and qualitative sample.

Table 1. Comparison of the quantitative and qualitative sample; final cluster size in both samples

	Quantitative sample Representative survey		Qualitative sample Semi-structured interviews	
	N	%(1)	N	%(1)
Language region				
German	778	70.3%	31	43.1%
French	319	28.8%	35	48.6%
Italian	10	0.9%	6	8.3%
Gender				
Male	499	44.4%	35	47.9%
Female	626	55.6%	38	52.1%
Age				
Below 30	167	14.8%	10	13.7%
31–40	201	17.9%	19	26.0%
41–50	234	20.8%	13	17.8%
51–60	202	18.0%	13	17.8%
61 and above	321	28.5%	18	24.7%
Urban-rural				
Urban	569	50.6%	36	49.3%
Rural	556	49.4%	37	50.7%
Final cluster size				
Institutional	195	17.5%	14	19.2%
Alternative	149	13.4%	12	16.4%
Distanced	640	57.4%	34	46.6%
Secular	130	11.7%	13	17.8%
Total(2)	1186	100.0%	73	100.0%

Notes:
(1) These are valid percentages, i.e., omitting the missing values and others.
(2) Totals for different variables may vary due to missing values.

Mixed data analysis

Quantitative data analysis techniques progressed in a conventional way from univariate to bivariate and multivariate analyses. In our qualitative data analysis, the interviews were thematically coded, with different codes being fixed from the beginning and other codes emerging inductively during coding. Once the coding scheme was stable, the whole material was again coded according to this final coding scheme (Kelle and Kluge 2010, 56–7). Qualitative and quantitative data were used jointly to create a final two-level typology (see below). Once the typology was fixed, all respondents in the qualitative and the quantitative data sets could be assigned to the different types and subtypes. Mixed data analysis was now used to describe and interpret the types with both quantitative and qualitative data. Thus, for example, items using the term "God" were analyzed quantitatively relating them to the variables representing our types and subtypes; at the same time, interview material that was coded with "God-codes" could be compared in our qualitative data analysis software across the different types and subtypes using segment matrices (Kuckartz 2014, 142). In this way, it was possible to see the frequencies with which, for example, Evangelicals answer God-items, and to combine this with insights on how Evangelicals talk about God in semi-structured interviews.

The creation of the typology

A relatively large number of items measuring religious beliefs and practices were standardized and analyzed with the help of a factor analysis (principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation, allowing factors to correlate) (Kim and Mueller 1978). This gave three factors that could be interpreted well: institutional beliefs and practices, alternative practices, and alternative beliefs. The factor analysis explained 37.1% of the total variance. Factors 1 and 2 were not significantly correlated; factors 2 and 3 were (unsurprisingly) correlated with r = -.283. Items that did not load more than .5 on one of these factors were excluded. This left us with the variables in Table A1 (Annex) that were then used in a two-step cluster analysis (SPSS 2001) separately on the quantitative sample and on the qualitative sample. The cluster analysis on the quantitative sample only gave us five clusters: one "institutional" (17.5%), one "alternative" (13.4%), one "secular" (11.7%) and two less easily interpretable that were combined into a "distanced" type (57.4%). The cluster analysis on the qualitative sample gave a solution with "institutional" (19.2%), "alternative" (16.4%), "distanced" (46.6%) and "secular" (17.8%). Table 1 gives the final cluster sizes that are remarkably similar between the quantitative and qualitative sample.

To obtain a "second level," which the qualitative analyses also suggested, I differentiated again within the types: 1. Within the institutional type, people belonging to an Evangelical church were combined into the evangelical subtype, while all others constituted the established subtype; 2. Within the alternative type, I distinguished between those who are highly committed with regard to the alternative-spiritual factor ("Esotericists") and those who are less highly committed ("Sheilaists and alternative customers"); 3. Within the secular type, I created two groups through a repeated cluster analysis ("Opponents of religion" and "Indifferents"); 4. Within the distanced type, I distinguished three subtypes through

a repeated cluster analysis: "Distanced-institutional," "Distanced-alternative," and "Distanced-secular." As can be seen from this description, the final typology was created with input from both the qualitative and quantitative data sets: the first level was given by quantitative analyses, but qualitative analysis led us to seek a "second level" and inspired us to use the different criteria used for these sub-groupings. In the analyses below we will see that – using the terminology proposed above – only Evangelicals, Established, and Esotericists are "milieus," whereas all other types and subtypes should be considered "social aggregates."

A note on the presentation of qualitative results below: longer quotes are italicized, set apart and identified with an anonymized name. Often, I just use several very short words or parts of sentences that are italicized and in quotes. These are always taken from interview material, even if the (anonymized) speaker is not identified. I use this way of presentation to show that the same concept can be expressed in various ways in each milieu.

RESULTS

THE FOUR TYPES

The four types are best presented in a two-dimensional space as in figure 1. The vertical dimension represents institutional religiosity, i.e. a religiosity that is recorded in the practice and doctrines according to Christian Churches. The horizontal dimension represents alternative spirituality, i.e. beliefs and practices promoted in the holistic milieu.

Institutionals

Institutionals, comprising 17.5% of our sample, attribute great value to the Christian faith and Christian practice in their own lives (Table 1). These are core members of the Catholic and Reformed religious communities, as well as the great majority of members of Evangelical churches. The Institutional believe in a single, personal and transcendental God. 63% believe in life after death. The Institutional have a pronounced religious practice, which is usually linked with the ideas and products of the churches and their core religious communities. Of those belonging to this type, 72% go to church at least once a month, while 69% pray daily. Within the type of the Institutional, we can distinguish two important subtypes: the "established" and the "evangelical." The Established (16.2%) are core members of Catholic and Reformed religious communities; they have a very personal religiousness and are actively involved within their religious community. They have often been subject to strong religious socialization and the continuation of this tradition is an important motive for them. Within this subtype, we can still find certain clearly recognizable denominational differences.

In contrast, members of the evangelical subtype (1.6%) are (to state the obvious) mostly members of Evangelical churches, or they show an evangelical style of religiousness. Here, the individual conversion – i.e., a turning towards the saviour Jesus Christ – is central. This conversion, which occurs completely individually, is usually symbolized later in the

forms of an adult baptism before the congregation. Individuals see themselves as "Christian" or "true Christian," and usually distance themselves from Christians for whom faith is not important in this way. Being a Christian means leading a life that is strongly shaped by faith, practising regularly, being actively involved in a religious community, converting non-Christians to the faith, and leading a clearly moral life. Within the "evangelical milieu," we can make out a classic, a Pentecostal and a conservative stream. We can find a certain overlap and sometimes also movements between the established and the evangelical subtypes.

Alternatives

A second type consists of Alternatives (13.4% of our sample). The people grouped together here have holistic and esoteric beliefs and practices. What can be noticed immediately is that the vocabulary that they use is very different to that used by the institutional type. For example, they speak in terms more of "spirituality" than of "religion," and, for them, it is less about "belief" than about "experience" and "knowledge." Around 52% believe that there is rebirth or reincarnation of the person in different lives. 58% deem it probable that there are people who can predict the future. People of this type are interested in the law of karma, contacts with angels and spirits, cosmic energies, chakras, the skills of secret masters, and the healing powers of stones, plants, and crystals. Among the practices of this type we find techniques of divination (tarot, channeling, palmistry), spiritual healing (shamanism, *faiseurs de secret*), breathing and movement techniques (e.g., tai chi, kinesiology, Alexander technique, yoga, meditation), healing techniques that work through the hands (e.g., reiki, acupressure), and various other techniques and rituals (e.g., nature rituals, hypnosis, female spirituality).

We can distinguish two subtypes here, too. Esotericists (2.9%) are people who very frequently use alternative-spiritual practices and see their whole lives immersed in an esoteric-spiritual light. Since they often attend and/or teach courses, shared rituals and spiritual workshops, they are part of a network of people who think and practise similarly: They are part of an esoteric milieu. A second and far less distinct subtype is composed of "Sheilaists" and "Alternative customers" (10.7%).[6] Sheilaists have developed their own forms of practice and faith – often without being in contact with other people, however. Alternative customers are individuals who consume and use products from alternative spirituality without heavily buying into the alternative spiritual worldview. This second subtype is in our view not a "milieu," but a "social aggregate," since, although the people grouped together here may share certain common forms of practice and belief, they are not connected with each other in social networks.

6. The term "Sheilaist" is used to refer to people who assemble their very own religion (after the name of a woman, "Sheila," who claimed that this was the case for her). See Bellah et al. (1985, 221).

Distanced

The largest group in our typology is the distanced type (57.4%). In a way, this type comprises those who are least considered by the scientific literature and the public – but that is precisely what makes this type the most interesting. Members of the distanced type do have certain religious and spiritual beliefs and practices – but these are not particularly important in their life and/or are activated only in rare cases. They often believe that there is "something higher" or some "energy," and they are concerned with the "meaning of life" and "reincarnation" – but they do not want to, or cannot, be much more specific. They may perhaps go to church for major celebrations (especially at Christmas) – but otherwise they are not drawn to places of worship. They are often members of the folk churches and pay the church tax – but they consider themselves "not practising." People belonging to this type not only distance themselves from the Christian religion and the churches – but frequently, they are also sceptical towards alternative ideas and practices. These middle positions are quantitatively demonstrated by the fact that the distanced type has the highest numbers of "neither-nor" statements. Readers acquainted with the relevant literature will have recognized that our distanced type is exactly what Voas (2010) calls "fuzzy fidelity." We can also divide this type into three subtypes, each of which comes near to one of the three "poles" that we have already distinguished: Distanced-institutionals, Distanced-alternatives, and Distanced-seculars. However, the boundaries here are often very blurred.

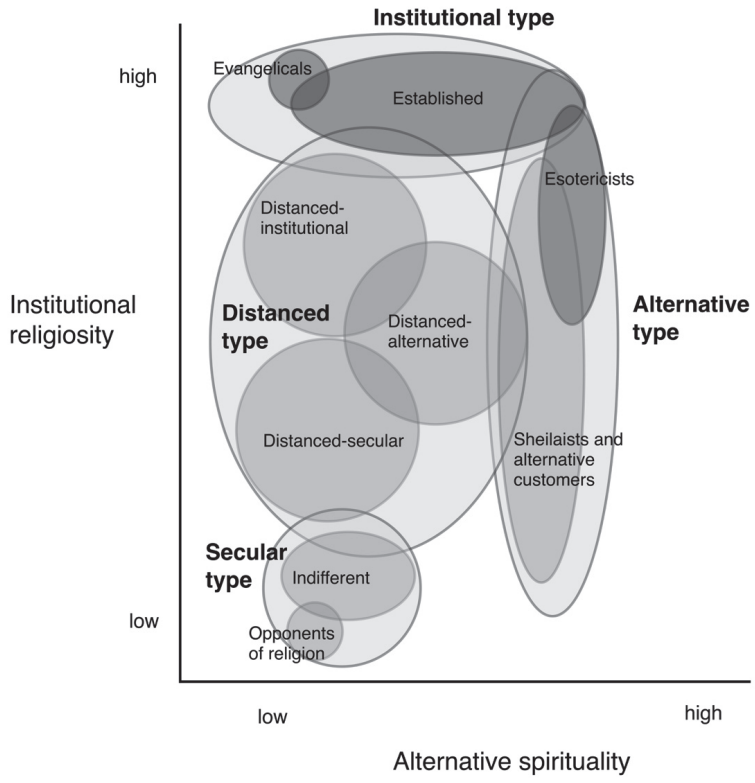

Figure 1. The types and subtypes

Seculars

The fourth type comprises Seculars, who make up 11.7% of our sample. These are people without any religious practices and without any religious beliefs. Around 44% claim not to believe in God, 83% consider churches to be unimportant for them personally, 73% never go to church, and about 50% fully agree with the statement that religions lead more to conflict than to peace. All this does not mean that these people are without philosophical convictions – they often have very clear views on general issues such as the origin of the human species, questions of social justice, and the meaning of life. However, the answers that they give are not religious, or are anti-religious. Again, we can distinguish two subtypes here: the Indifferent and the Opponents of religion. The former are completely indifferent to religion, the church and faith, but also to esotericism and spiritual healing. The latter are often strongly critical of both institutional religion and alternative spirituality – but also of non-Christian religions.

Table 2. Typical beliefs and forms of practice of the four types (in percent)

	Institutional	Alternative	Distanced	Secular	Total
God is interested in every person(1)	**89.7**	45.5	40.6	2.3	45.6
Life after death(1)	**63.4**	40.6	13.6	0	56.8
Goes to church at least once a month	**71.8**	6.0	6.9	0	23.8
Prays every day	**69.3**	23.5	20.8	0	27.2
Reincarnation(1)	29.1	**51.7**	31.5	9.5	31.2
There are people who can predict the future(1)	33.5	**57.4**	28.0	18.3	32.0
Has read an esoteric book(3)	9.4	**57.5**	14.4	10.0	18.7
Has had healing through hands(3)	25.3	**66.9**	33.6	31.3	36.3
God is the positive in people (neither/nor)	20.0	26.9	**39.6**	20.0	31.7
God is a cosmic energy (neither/nor)	23.8	28.1	**39.3**	8.3	30.8
Christianity is the basis of Swiss society (neither/nor)	15.0	34.1	**39.4**	32.6	33.1
Goes to church approximately once or twice a year	5.2	19.0	**30.1**	15.7	27.2
Does not believe in God	3.6	8.1	5.2	**43.7**	9.7
Churches are not important for me personally(1)	4.6	47.8	32.8	**83.4**	35.9
Never goes to church	2.1	21.8	23.6	**73.2**	15.3
Religions lead more to conflict than to peace(2)	14.9	36.5	37.0	**49.6**	34.6

Notes: (1) Percent agreeing fully or quite; (2) Percent agreeing fully; (3) in the last year

THE TYPES AND THEIR GOD(S)

In what follows, I describe the different ways in which our types and subtypes construct "God" – drawing both on the qualitative and quantitative (tables 2 and 3) material.

Institutionals

Institutionals in general believe, in a characteristic way, in a personal God. 97.8% assert that God exists and has made himself known through Jesus Christ; 89.7% think that God takes care of each person, so that individuals can tell him in prayer about their own worries, hardships, joys and hopes. In other ways, however, God is perceived rather differently in the two subtypes, established and evangelical. The established subtype sees God as a transcendental figure who listens sympathetically and kindly, who can be confided in with anything, and who welcomes every individual unconditionally. This God is neither authoritarian nor does he inspire fear, but gives emotional and moral support. Apart from this, God hardly seems to intervene at all in the physical and historical world, although, for most members of the established subtype, he probably could. For Nathalie, for example, God is an "infinite presence" whom she "loves infinitely." Beatrice explains that God is someone "you can say anything to and he listens (…), it is a relationship of absolute trust." From a distance, the God of the established subtype appears as a mixture of benevolent parents who accept their child unconditionally, and a psychotherapist who listens supportively to whatever the patient may present. Interestingly, members of the established subtype quite often have doubts concerning the existence of God and concerning theodicy: if God exists, why does he allow bad things to happen? The Established ruminate over these questions, but, finding no answer, often just continue to believe. In contrast, the God of the evangelical subtype is a much more active figure than that of the established subtype. On the one hand, he is in a very close personal relationship with the evangelical subtype, for whom he is "like a mother," "my healer," "my saviour" and "closest friend." On the other hand, he is an eminent and omnipotent figure of authority: God is the "Lord of all," the "boss," the "God of Creation who created all things," and someone who "holds the reins." For the evangelical subtype, God cannot be separated from Jesus, in whose form God redeemed people of their sins on the cross. It is he who gives access to paradise and who will return in the form of Jesus. At the same time, members of the evangelical subtype believe that God also intervenes very actively in daily life. Everything that happens is an effect of God. He heals, finds people an apprenticeship, brings partners together and decides on life and death. The theodicy question can sometimes appear among the evangelical subtype, too, with the solution usually being to ascribe unknown rational reasons to God. God has "an ulterior motive for everything" (Beatrice). Members of the evangelical subtype do not doubt that this God exists, with 95.5% stating that they "know that God really exists and have no doubts about it" (in comparison, only 70.3% of the established subtype makes the same claim).

Alternatives

The first thing we must understand when trying to capture the way Alternatives construct "God," is that the concept of "God" and "belief in God" are normally not central in the alternative world view. Therefore, the items best distinguishing Alternatives from the other types do not include the word "God" (table 2). When Alternatives (especially Esotericists) use the word "God," they often use it as a synonym for what also might be expressed with terms like force, energy, light, strength, love, color, breath, power, spirit, or life. And it is not so much *belief in*, but rather *experience of*, the God-force-energy that is required. This God-force may reside both in the outside world and in the individual person, defying every distinction or dualism of immanence/transcendence, outside/inside, male/female. In this sense, the God-force, as well as alternative spirituality in general, is "holistic." Klaus (62), for example, explains: "just as air is everywhere, so also is power, or spirit. The divine is everywhere, in every atom. The only question is whether I in fact perceive it at all, the reality, and of course if I'm locked out by my concepts, then I can't see reality." Or, to quote Emily (62): "For me, God is not a father figure or any kind of figure, but an infinite power, an infinite energy; for me, God is light." Or Maude (50):

> God is the only God, yes, but he is made of different things. He is a comfort, like a cushion you can lie on. A cushion that can comfort you but can't give you bread, or anything to eat or drink. (…) God is not a person, because he can't answer you, but he can listen. It is a space for me, a little moment to pause where you can find yourself.

For Alternatives (especially Esotericists), the divine expresses itself in multiple ways. Klaus explains that there are "obviously many faces and forms in which the divine may manifest itself and incarnate itself in man, it is not primarily Catholic or Hindu, or something else (…)." For Lucia, the Reiki-force comes from Buddha and Jesus alike. Maude draws strength from both the crucifix and the Buddha statue.

Members of the esotericist subtype are very conscious of their alternative spirituality ideology. Interestingly, they may not only agree strongly with alternative spirituality items (e.g. 100.0% believe that some healers have God-given powers; 78.2% believe in supernatural forces in the universe), but also with typically Christian items (75.0% believe that God exists and has shown himself in Jesus Christ). This can be explained by the fact that Esotericists believe very strongly that the God-force manifests itself in all kinds of ways, and thus also in God and Jesus Christ – leading them to a specifically alternative-spirituality way of interpreting "God," "Jesus," and "Christ." Thus, according to Michel, Jesus and Christ are two different phenomena: Jesus is a human being and "a spiritual master who did not need to reincarnate anymore," whereas Christ is a "higher entity" that "was able to redeem the collective karma." The subtype Sheilaists and alternative customers have a less clear view of "God" and can only with difficulty be distinguished from each other in their construction of God and their beliefs from the distanced groups. Their specific character is due not so much to their beliefs and ideology, as to their alternative spirituality practices.

Distanced

The God of the distanced group may best be summarized by the label of "God-something-higher." In the quantitative data, we find that distanced individuals have a mostly doubtful or fuzzy mode of belief in God (table 3). There is "something," members of this group may tell us, but we do not know what it is exactly; or if we do know what it might be – we have doubts that it is there; or we only believe in it sometimes and at other times we don't. The distanced group has distanced itself from a clear description of and a firm belief in God. This "something higher" is expressed with a great many of rather abstract labels and metaphors, such as "something above us," a "supernatural power that controls us," a "framework," "ground," "collective unconscious," or "universal love." Kaitline (63), for example, says:

> I personally believe that there is something that dominates us. If you look at nature in its perfection – that cannot be the work of humans. The human can only add, renew, change, destroy, rebuild – what is already there. But to begin with there is a power that is above us. Now, what we should call this power – I don't know.

Or take Renate (51), who names this higher entity "something above": "I have the feeling as though something were above us, something which doesn't exercise its power, though, but just provides the framework for us to develop in."

Whatever name is used, though, this "something higher" is not firmly embraced by members of the distanced group. Knowing what God is like is, "difficult to say"; "hard, when one starts thinking about it"; "a good question." In the interviews, it also becomes clear that the question of God-something-higher is not very important in the lives of distanced individuals. It becomes important only sometimes, in certain contexts, such as when going to a funeral, when confronted with a very difficult situation, or at Christmas.[7] Most of the distanced members talked to us about God-something-higher and related questions for an hour only, because we came to talk to them about it; otherwise, they would not have reflected on these questions. Finally, it is very noticeable that many members of this type often waver in their assessment of God-something higher. Bettina is "torn this way and that"; Kaitline speaks of oscillating ("coming and going"); Maia cannot believe that God is sitting up there somewhere, and yet somehow still believes that he is; for Marcel, the things within are now very "paradoxical." Karol (64) says:

> At the moment, I'm going backwards and forwards. At one moment, I believe, and then there are elements that make me not believe. I tell myself it's not possible. There are so many things that happen; there can't be a single cause somewhere. (…) I waver between Yes and No, with some very strong moments and other moments of much less intensity.

The three distanced subtypes differ in that they tend towards the different God-types of the more clearly defined types – and yet keep their distance. Distanced-institutionals tend to

7. Distanced Christians have been aptly called "submarine Christians" because they emerge once a year at Christmas, only to dive down again.

see the "something higher" in terms of a God-the-person – and yet have their doubts and wavering; Distanced-alternatives will sometimes tend to believe – but not wholly embrace the idea of – a God-force. Distanced-seculars are often thinking that God doesn't exist – yet some belief in a God persists.

Seculars

Not surprisingly, members of the secular type have the fewest religious beliefs, with only 10% believing in "something higher," and only 2% in a God who takes care of each individual person. Seculars reject not only Christian but also alternative-spiritual beliefs, with only 10% believing in reincarnation, and only 5% in the existence of "transcendental forces in the universe that influence people's lives." According to Seculars, God is an imaginary help for people who think they need it – and they themselves certainly do not. God is, as we may call it, God-the-illusion. Thus, Peter (65) says: "no, certainly not, I do not need a God or anybody. If he existed, I would perhaps believe in him, but then of course he doesn't exist, does he?" And Cécile (38) reports that "I do not need to believe in somebody higher, to hold on to something. I am a rational person (…) logical, organized, when there is a problem, you seek a solution."

When asked what they believe in – if not in God – Seculars do have answers. They believe in "man," "life," "evolution," "nature," "scientific laws," "universal values," "retributive justice," or "mother earth." These beliefs, however, are not religious in the sense that their objects would represent transcendent entities that could deliver the blessing of salvation. Rather, Seculars here inform us of what, in their worldview, stands in the place where they believe God stands in the believers' worldview. Karine (68) is typical when she says: "I don't believe [in God]. I believe in people. Despite everything that happens, despite all the terrible things that you can see going on. I still believe that there is something in people, their conscience, if you will, which pushes humanity on. That's what it's about for me."

Interestingly, Seculars can believe in the power and effectiveness of God – but they see it as a mainly negative effectiveness of a powerful illusion. God and religion can lead to false hopes, conflicts, even wars. Peter believes that all previous wars were "somehow based on religion." Ernesto thinks that religion is "always on the side of the powerful." And Gregory (70) tells us that religion is a "clever exploitation (I apologize if you're religious); a clever exploitation of human weakness."

The main difference between the two subgroups of Indifferents and Opponents of religion is that while Indifferents talk about their unbelief in a rather neutral way, Opponents do so in an emphatically negative manner. Indifferents do not complain about religion or try to convince religious people of the falsity of their views; neither do they represent any anti-religious ideologies. Some even reveal a slight wistfulness – it would be nice, say these respondents, if they could believe in, say, life after death or a benevolent God. But they simply cannot. Opponents of religion, on the other hand, maintain an emphatic non-belief. For them, it is important to reject religion in front of others, often using terms that are negatively loaded, derogatory metaphors and swear words to express their opinion. Peter has no use for these "old wives' tales," while Siegfried does not believe in the "happy hunting grounds." And Ernesto says: "Ha, a higher power! No, absolutely not!"

When comparing the types and their Gods, we can better understand why, in surveys, the belief in "something higher" is usually so strong. The reason is that "something higher" is so abstractly formulated that Institutionals, Alternatives, and Distanced (but not Seculars) may agree with the item – although each with a different understanding of what that "something higher" exactly means.

Table 3. Contents and modes of belief in God and higher powers according to subtypes (in percent)

	Established	Evangelical	Esotericist	Sheilaist	Distanced -Institutional	Distanced-Alternative	Distanced-Secular	Indifferent	Opponents of religion
Contents of belief									
There is a God who has shown himself in Jesus Christ	97.5	100.0	75.0	28.3	74.4	37.0	26.0	12.2	0.0
God is interested in every human being	88.6	100.0	75.0	36.5	61.5	38.7	18.3	4.0	0.0
Some faith healers do have God-given healing powers	58.8	59.0	100.0	62.3	45.3	46.3	27.7	13.5	16.7
There are supernatural forces in the universe that influence the life of man	44.8	35.3	78.2	48.4	57.9	57.8	27.3	8.6	0.0
There is something like a higher power	82.9	91.6	90.6	76.6	82.6	85.9	59.6	10.4	8.0
Modes of belief									
Atheism	4.0	0.0	6.3	8.6	4.9	3.8	7.6	29.3	72.2
Agnosticism	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.5	3.1	6.1	19.3	33.3	11.1
Fuzzy belief in God	5.2	4.5	40.6	53.4	33.6	62.5	51.2	30.6	16.7
Doubtful belief in God	20.6	0.0	18.8	11.2	28.7	15.0	17.3	6.7	0.0
Certain belief in God	70.3	95.5	34.4	11.2	29.6	12.7	4.6	0.0	0.0

Note: The items representing the different modes of belief are the following: Atheism: I don't believe in God; Agnosticism: I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is any way to find out; Fuzzy belief: I don't believe in a personal God, but I do believe in a Higher Power of some kind; I find myself believing in God some of the time, but not at others; Doubtful belief: While I have doubts, I feel that I do believe in God; Certain belief: I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it. Typical contents and modes of subtypes are highlighted.

THE TYPES AND GENERATIONAL CHANGE

How have our types changed in size over time? Summarizing the assessment based on a large number of indicators in Stolz et al. (2016, 181–5), we can say that since the 1950s, Institutionals have shrunk whereas Distanced, Alternatives and Seculars have grown, the

distanced group becoming by far the largest group. In the future, however, I expect continuing secularization to lead to a shrinking of the distanced group, and a strong growth of the secular group.

Both the qualitative and quantitative samples suggest that the form of this change is in large part generational. In the qualitative sample, I reconstructed the type of parental background of our respondents in terms of our typology based on the information given in the semi-structured interviews (Table 4). Although numbers are small, it becomes clear that respondents with institutional backgrounds had a high chance of becoming either institutional, alternative, or distanced as adults; respondents with distanced parental background had a high chance of becoming distanced or secular. And respondents with secular backgrounds were likely to remain secular. While other intergenerational changes did happen, the trend went clearly from institutional to distanced to secular. These data do not tell us anything about the effects of alternative spirituality socialization since we only had one alternative spirituality parental background in our sample.

In the quantitative sample, the overall secularizing trend can equally be observed, although in a less pronounced way. Here, I had to construct religious parental background from the religious attendance of the mother and the father of the respondent when the respondent was a child. I added the two 9-step variables (giving variables ranging from 2–18 points) and coded the resulting variable as follows: 2–5 points: secular parental background; 6–12 points: distanced parental background; 13–18 points: institutional parental background. This is of course only an approximation of the typology used otherwise in this article, and it does not allow constructing an alternative parental background. Nevertheless, it allows us to see if the general secularizing tendency observed in the qualitative data shows up equally in these data. In table 4 (quan sample), I give the cross-tabulation of parental background type and respondent type – separately for respondents aged 18–40, 41–60, and 61+. Again, we see an overall secularizing trend. For example, for families of respondents aged 61+ with an institutional background, only 50% of respondents stayed in the institutional group.

Interestingly, this already low retention rate drops to 31.2% among respondents aged 41–60 and to 26.7% among respondents aged 18–40! Differently from our qualitative sample, parents with a secular background do not produce mostly secular offspring, instead the majority becomes distanced. However, over time, the percentage of children of Seculars who remain secular rises. Overall, these data confirm the general secularizing trend in the intergenerational tradition of religiosity. Log-linear models permit testing the significance of marginal effects and different-level interactions when various categorical variables are involved. A log-linear model that is not presented here for lack of space confirmed that the three-way interaction between the age of the respondent, parental background type and respondent type is statistically significant.[8]

8. I fitted a Poisson-type log-linear model with respondents' type, parental background type, age of respondent, and sex of respondent.

Table 4. The reproduction of the types and milieus in the qual and quan sample

	Type respondents						
Qual-sample							
Parental background	Institutional	Alternative	Distanced	Secular	Total %	N	X^2
Institutional	31.6	21.1	42.1	5.3	100%	38	28.09**
Alternative	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%	1	
Distanced	7.1	7.1	60.7	25.0	100%	28	
Secular	0.0	16.7	16.7	66.7	100%	6	
Total						73	
Quan-sample							
Parental background							
Age 18-40							
Institutional	26.7	11.6	57	4.7	100%	86	54.12***
Distanced	4.7	14.6	64.9	15.8	100%	171	
Secular	10.9	14.3	57.1	17.7	100%	93	
Age 41-60							
Institutional	31.2	14.9	46.1	7.8	100%	154	26.90***
Distanced	13.1	17.9	60.7	8.3	100%	168	
Secular	8	20.7	58.6	12.6	100%	87	
Age 61+							
Institutional	50	5.1	42.9	2	100%	98	56.18***
Distanced	15.2	6.8	64.4	13.6	100%	132	
Secular	5.1	8.5	76.3	10.2	100%	59	
Total						1048	

CONCLUSION

Spinoza wrote already in 1665 that if triangles could speak, they would say that God is triangular – while circles would see God as round.[9] Feuerbach ([1851] 1967, 241) took up this idea when he wrote that not God made man, but man made God in his image. This article stands in a general continuity with these philosophers in the sense that we also look at how different groups of people use their different structural and cultural

9. Letter to William van Blyenbergh (1665) as quoted by Pollock (1880, 50–51).

resources to construct different types of Gods. The goal of this article has been to find large religious/spiritual/secular groups in Swiss society, to analyze how these groups construct "God(s)," and to see how the groups change in size over time. I have used mixed methods to be able to construct a typology that is both representative and grounded in qualitative data. I have found four broad types: Institutionals, Alternatives, Distanced, and Seculars, each comprising subtypes. Each type shows a typical way of constructing God. Very schematically, we can summarize that Institutionals believe in a personal God who takes care of every human being ("God-the person"); Alternatives find that experience is more important than belief and see God as a force or energy both inside and outside man ("God-force"); Distanced have a rather fuzzy, abstract, and fluctuating view of God that is best captured by the label "something higher" ("God-something-higher"); while Seculars are certain that God does not exist, although the idea of God may create great harm in society ("God-the illusion"). The types clearly change in size over time in accord with secularization theory. Over time, the Institutional group and the currently largest group of Distanced will decrease, while the Seculars will in the future grow. It is not yet clear how Alternatives will fare, but they do not seem to be growing.

For God as a social construct, this means that images of God as a person or as something higher will in the long term lose out to a concept where God appears as nothing but an illusion.

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APPENDIX

Appendix Table 1. Selected variables (factor analysis)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Institutional belief and practice			
Belief: There is a God that has made himself known in Jesus Christ (5-step)	.844		
Belief: God is interested in every human being (5-step)	.805		
Belief: Life has a meaning because God is interested in every human being (5-step)	.755		
Belief: There is a higher power (5-step)	.538		-.298
Belief: Do you believe in heaven (4-step)	.769		
Belief: Do you believe in religious miracles (4-step)	.756		
Belief: Do you believe in life after death (4-step)	.657		
Belief: Do you believe in hell (4-step)	.636		
Practice: Taking part in religious service (9-step)	.799		.408
Practice: Taking part in other church activities (9-step)	.599		.368
Practice: Praying (11-step)	.738		
Alternative practice			
Practice: Read a book or magazine on esotericism in last year (2-step)		.633	
Practice: Ordered a horoscope or used a clairvoyant in last year (2-step)		.520	
Practice: Used techniques of spiritual healing or been to a healer last year (2-step)		.602	
Practice: Used a method of breathing technique, relaxation or movement)(2-step)		.647	
Practice: Used a method where the body is treated with hands, e.g. reiki (2-step)		.550	
Practice: Oriental meditation, e.g. Zen (2-step)		.614	
Alternative belief			
Belief: Higher power is an eternal cycle that unites man, nature and cosmos (5-step)			-.662
Belief: God is a cosmic energy that influences our life (5-step)			-.623
Belief: Own way of connecting with God without churches/rel. services (5-step)			-.591
Belief: There are supernat. forces in the universe influencing human beings (5-step)	.355		-.560
Belief: To me, God is what is positive in human beings (5-step)			-.506

Note: Items with factor loadings below .5 are not shown and were omitted for the subsequent two-step cluster analysis.