

Study: 2 in 10 atheist scientists are 'spiritual'

by [Adelle M. Banks](#)

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(RNS) More than 20 percent of atheist scientists consider themselves to be "spiritual," according to a Rice University study.

The findings, to be published in the June issue of the journal *Sociology of Religion*, are based on in-depth interviews with 275 natural and social scientists from 21 of the nation's top research universities.

Elaine Howard Ecklund, lead author of the study and an assistant professor of sociology at the Houston university, said the research shows that spirituality is not solely a pursuit of religious people.

"Spirituality pervades both the religious and atheist thought," she said. "It's not an either/or. This challenges the idea that scientists, and other groups we typically deem as secular, are devoid of those big 'Why am I here?' questions. They too have these basic human questions and a desire to find meaning."

Ecklund and other researchers found that these "spiritual atheists" viewed not believing in God "as an act of strength, which for them makes spirituality more congruent with science than religion."

These scientists view both spirituality and science as "meaning-making without faith," the study authors said. They viewed spirituality as congruent with science but not with religion because a religious commitment requires acceptance of an absolute "absence of empirical evidence."