RELIGIOUS CONVERSION
A PHILOSOPHICAL ACCOUNT

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This thesis poses the question: what is religious conversion? First I unpack this, and highlight some initial difficulties concerning the vagueness and context-sensitivity involved in the question. I propose a model for religious conversion on which it involves three dimensions: the doxastic dimension (concerning belief); the affective dimension (concerning emotion); and the dimension of praxis (concerning behaviour). The various changes that constitute a religious conversion involve reciprocal influences between each pair of these dimensions. I explore each dimension in turn, and, in the final chapter, integrate them into a view about the dynamics of religious conversion, and its philosophical implications. My discussion of the role of belief in religious conversion centres on the question of how religious beliefs are formed, and on their justification. I argue that religious experience is key in belief formation, and give grounds for thinking that even if epistemic justification of such beliefs will obtain only infrequently, and will be difficult to establish, such beliefs could also be justified either pragmatically or morally. My discussion of the role of emotion considers views on which emotion is purely cognitive and views on which it is purely non-cognitive, and argues that emotion involves both cognitive and non-cognitive components. I explore the influence of emotions on belief formation. I claim that emotions can be assessed in terms of rationality, and can sometimes be rational, which means that the influence of emotions, while it can sometimes lead to self-deceptive or irrational beliefs, can also bestow additional justification on beliefs. My discussion of the role of praxis in religious conversion considers views on which behaviour is expressive, and views on which behaviour is instrumental, and claims that neither approach is satisfactory. Behaviour involves both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects. I explore the ways in which behaviour influences both emotion and belief, and belief and emotion influence behaviour, and discuss the notion of ‘acceptance’ and its role in conversion. I propose a model of religious conversion on which the process involves the layering of each of the three dimensions in a cumulative and self-perpetuating spiral, whereby a single change makes further change more likely due to the intimate links between the three dimensions. I show that this integrative model is key in explaining the shift in religious understanding that occurs in conversion. Having proposed this model, I consider some implications. I claim that due to the nature of the dimensions of religious conversion, conversion can
be indirectly voluntary, and therefore is something for which we are morally responsible. This means that while there are excusing factors (such as inculpable ignorance or force) we can be ultimately responsible for our own state of religiosity. I explore the idea of religious conversion as moral change, and conclude that while specific conversions will be difficult to evaluate, there is the possibility of both ethical and unethical conversions. Whether or not a conversion is ethical will depend in part on its justification.
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## BIBLIOGRAPHY
**INTRODUCTION**

My central aim is to elucidate the concept of religious conversion and understand what it is and what it involves. Loosely, I am interested in the phenomenon whereby an adult (or adolescent) who was previously non-religious or irreligious, undergoes some kind of change, the end result of which is that they are religious. In this secular age, more people are raised without being inculcated into a religious faith. Therefore it is more interesting than ever before to look at the phenomenon whereby people who were not previously religious find an impulse within them to dramatically shift the pattern of their lives.

The inspiration for this thesis comes from an event in my life. One afternoon, I was visiting my adolescent sister in Florida having not seen her for almost a year, since she had emigrated there from England with the rest of my family. She shared with me that she had undergone a religious conversion, and I enquired further. She said that since living in Florida she had met many religious people, whom she respected and liked. They seemed happy, successful, and had direction and purpose. She was accepted by them, and began attending a church, where she made friends. She began participating in religious events, attending ‘revivals’, church groups, and social events. She enjoyed it, she felt good about it, and she declared that now she believed in God. She was a Christian. From a desire to understand my sister, came a desire to understand her conversion. My usual recourse, as a philosopher, was to research the phenomenon and to attempt some kind of philosophical analysis of the concept of religious conversion. My initial research showed that while religious conversion is a subject of some popularity in other disciplines, such as theology, psychology, sociology, and anthropology, there has been surprisingly little philosophical research on this subject. This was surprising to me, especially given the pervasiveness of the phenomenon throughout history. Having identified a gap in philosophical research, and having had a strong desire sparked in me to understand the phenomenon, I set upon the current project.

At the outset, I was drawing on a strongly analytic philosophical background, and my methodology was to attempt a conceptual analysis of ‘religious conversion’, identifying the necessary and sufficient conditions. After struggling with this for a
time, I came to see the project as futile – no such conditions were forthcoming, and I was unsatisfied with all of the suggestions inspired by the literature. What came next was a change in methodology, which sprung from a deep change in my own approach to the subject. I came to see the limitations of the method of conceptual analysis – the attempt to rigidify and systematise was still an impulse, but I came to understand that often it does not so much clarify a concept as abstract it to the point of irrelevance. Each ‘definition’ seemed out of touch with the real, lived experience of the actual convert. I (painfully) veered away from the predominant tradition that formed my philosophical education, or at least came to see that it is not enough on its own; and the result is a more person-centred and integrative approach. I have tried to remain in touch with the experiences, lives, practices, feelings and beliefs of those who actually undergo religious conversions, and it is my hope that in addition to filling an obvious gap in the philosophical research, this work will also have relevance more generally, to anyone who is interested in religiosity as one of the most intriguing shared human traits.

The personal nature of the investigation is appropriate given the nature of the topic – the subject itself calls for an immersion in the form of life in which it occurs. This is reflected too in the writing style adopted in places, and from time to time, departing from the prevailing convention in academic writing, I have felt free to use the first personal pronoun. I will use examples taken from case studies, and my view has been influenced by accounts taken from my own interactions with people I’ve discussed this topic with, who felt compelled to share their own experiences with me. This is not used in any sense to prove that certain things are the case, so the lack of scientific rigour should not be taken to be a disadvantage – these examples are merely illustrative. However, what these examples might show is how we (as members of a community in which the concept of religious conversion has a use) understand the concept of religious conversion. As this phenomenon is one that, in part, gets its import and significance from the role that it plays in our lives and the lives of those in our community, this understanding is relevant to and partly constitutive of the phenomenon under investigation.

I will attempt to navigate the territory without making assumptions about the existence of objects of religious worship (for example God) or the nature of the universe, as ‘surely, in a multi-cultural world we need a theoretical approach to the study of religions that is not from the outset prejudicial to any religion’, or non-
In the literature there are what we might call ‘religious’ and ‘non-religious’ understandings of religious conversion, distinguishable by what they presuppose in their explanation of the phenomenon. They diverge on ‘whether the subject-matter of religion is regarded as ontologically primary or as an ontologically secondary phenomenon’. I will remain neutral, and try to capture both what the religious person considers important, and what non-religious disciplines can explain.

It might already be glaringly obvious from these introductory remarks on the phenomenon of religious conversion that what we mean by the term ‘religious’ and the term ‘conversion’, are philosophical questions in their own right. These questions will be my focus in Chapter One – Religious Conversion, and my strategy will be to unpack the concept of ‘conversion’ in its most general sense, and then engage with attempts to analyse the concept of ‘religiosity’. I will argue that conversions in general involve a paradigm shift analogous to the changes involved in scientific revolutions. I will give an interpretation of ‘conversion’ on which conversion is any radical shift from one position or perspective to another. I will also argue that religiosity is not a definable concept, but rather a vague and context-sensitive concept that is understood in virtue of family resemblances. This feature of language makes it possible for the same words to have different meanings in different contexts, and given that (as I will argue) religious conversion involves a shift in context, this means that they can involve linguistic shifts too, which result in religious language having a different meaning post-conversion. Thus a religious conversion, at first glance, will be a radical shift from a non-religious perspective to one describable as religious. I claim that while this will not involve exactly the same features in all cases, and is therefore not definable in a straightforward way, it involves certain identifiable dimensions. By exploring these dimensions and the interplay between them we can come to better understand the phenomenon. Each of the three chapters that follow will focus on one of these dimensions, and the philosophical questions that they raise.

In Chapter Two – The Doxastic Dimension, I will focus on the belief-related aspects of conversion. As I am concerned with religious conversion in general as opposed to conversion to this or that particular religion, we cannot expect there to be

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any specific beliefs common to all conversions. Rather, I will consider the nature of belief and draw some general conclusions about the nature of religious belief in particular. In order to better understand the process of religious conversion, I explore the main ways in which religious beliefs are formed, namely, via reasoned argument, via religious experience, and via testimony.

I will then consider the justification of religious beliefs. I distinguish several ways in which a belief could be justified, which I call ‘moral’, ‘epistemic’ and ‘pragmatic’, and discuss each in turn. On the topic of moral justification, I discuss Clifford’s principle, which links the ethics of belief to the epistemic justification, in that it is wrong to hold a belief that you have insufficient evidence for. I also discuss James’s recommended loosening of this principle, and the exceptions he makes. I make a case for the possibility that it can be morally licit to hold religious beliefs, even if they have insufficient evidence, epistemically speaking. On the topic of epistemic justification I focus on the connection between religious experiences and religious belief. I discuss two arguments for religious belief from religious experience, the argument from credulity and the argument from analogy. I raise serious doubts about both of these arguments, and conclude that while genuine religious experiences might struggle to qualify as meeting adequate standards for justifying religious belief, it is also not impossible that they could. On the topic of pragmatic justification I claim that some religious beliefs might function as ‘hinge’ beliefs, and thus have a special status, meaning that they can be pragmatically justified if they play an appropriate role in one’s network of beliefs.

In Chapter Three – The Affective Dimension I will discuss the emotional aspects of religious conversion, and argue that religious conversion will involve a shift in the emotional experiences, dispositions, and moods of an individual. I consider what this means in more detail by exploring the nature of emotions, including whether we should understand them cognitively or non-cognitively. I argue that emotions involve both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects. I also explore the reflexive interaction between belief and emotion, including how emotions affect belief formation and retention, as well as affecting the significance that certain beliefs have for an individual and the connections that are perceived to exist between beliefs.

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3 It might turn out that some specific belief or beliefs are necessary for religious conversion to some specific religion or religious sect. Whichever beliefs these turn out to be will be part of the ‘belief set’ necessary for conversion to that particular religion or sect.
My discussion turns next to the topic of self-deceptive belief, where I argue that beliefs formed under the influence of emotions risk being self-deceptive, and some religious beliefs will be of this type. At first, it may appear that all beliefs formed under the influence of emotion are epistemically unjustified, due to the fact that they are not formed purely in response to evidence. However, I argue that if the emotions can be defended as capable of being rational, then some beliefs can actually gain additional justification from the emotions that influence them. I claim that emotions can be epistemically, pragmatically, or morally justified, and make a case for the conclusion that the emotions can be rational.

In Chapter Four – The Dimension of Praxis, I consider the practical dimension of religious conversion, which includes actions and behaviours that change as a result of the conversion process. Under this heading are included things like praying, attending a place of worship, using new symbols or language, and participating in rituals and ceremonies. I will consider to what extent participation in rituals involves belief, and to what extent it involves emotion. This can be framed in terms of the debate between intellectualist and expressivist accounts of ritual engagement, which reduce the explanation of ritual to cognitive or to non-cognitive aspects respectively. I will argue that neither account adequately captures everything that is important about religious ritual, but that engagement in ritual involves both cognitive and non-cognitive components. Having discussed the interaction between the cognitive and non-cognitive in this context, I continue by outlining the points of interaction between praxis and emotion and between praxis and belief. Having shown in the previous chapter that emotions influence belief and beliefs influence emotions, here I show that beliefs and emotions influence behaviour, and that behaviour influences beliefs and emotions. Lastly, I discuss the role of acceptance, which I take to be a positive epistemic state that we can voluntarily adopt with respect to a proposition. I explore the role that acceptance plays in religious conversion and the way that this illuminates the interaction that occurs between the three dimensions of conversion which I have discussed.

Finally, in Chapter Five – The Conversion Process, I give a general summary of my account of religious conversion. No dimension has clear priority over the other two, causally or conceptually. Rather, what emerges is the image of a spiral, where any single change in any given dimension will bring about changes in other dimensions, thereby leading to a reinforcing or strengthening of religiosity. I will
complete my account by introducing the notion of understanding, and will suggest that conversion involves a new or deeper religious understanding, in which all the three dimensions of religiosity I’ve discussed play a vital role: when something is fully understood, it is believed, felt, and lived.

With the model of religious conversion now in place, I examine the ethical status of religious conversion. I argue that each dimension of religious conversion has a voluntary component sufficient for moral responsibility, so there is a moral dimension to belief and emotion, as well as action. As these components are constituents of religious conversion, there is a moral dimension to religious conversion. The conclusion is that whether or not we convert is a normative question, and one that we are morally accountable for in our own lives. I close the chapter by indicating some of the ways in which religious conversion involves moral change.

In summary, this thesis will propose a model of religious conversion, and demonstrate some of its consequences. Some aspects of this model will be shown by analogy, while others are more explicit, but where the degree of precision is less than ideal, this is because the subject matter does not allow for more precision, and sometimes an analogical model can serve better.
CHAPTER 1

RELIGIOUS CONVERSION

*If we compare a proposition to a picture, we must think whether we are comparing it to a portrait (a historical representation) or to a genre-picture. And both comparisons have a point.*

I will embark on this study of religious conversion by delineating the meaning of ‘religious conversion’. I take ‘religious conversion’ to be a conversion of a religious type, so I will break the exploration down into an elaboration of what I shall mean by a ‘conversion’, and what it is for something to be ‘religious’. This strategy will be productive given that there is surprisingly little philosophical literature on religious conversion, so this approach will allow research on these more general concepts to be usefully applied to the narrower field I consider here.

In its most general sense, conversion is not a strictly religious phenomenon, but can refer more generally to significant changes in a person’s outlook or beliefs. I shall suggest that one thing that occurs in conversions is a shift in ‘mental field’ (of the kind described by William James) whereby certain things gain or lose salience for the convert. I will also explore an analogy between the radical interior changes that occur when an individual undergoes conversion and the kind of radical changes that occur in scientific revolutions. This will lead to some general conclusions about the nature of conversion, including that it involves something analogous to a paradigm shift. I shall also draw some comparisons between what happens in conversion and the kind of Gestalt switch (as in the famous ‘duck rabbit’ case) that enables a given object or event to be perceived in a new way. A picture will emerge in which what essentially changes in the course of a religious conversion, is analogous to what changes when we are looking at a duckrabbit and we stop seeing a duck and start seeing a rabbit.

In the second part of the chapter, I shall turn to the concept of religiosity, and consider what it is for something or someone to count as ‘religious’. I will outline the

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2 Non-religious conversions may include but are not limited to: pseudo-religious conversions, scientific conversions, political conversions, social conversions, and personality conversions.
way we can and do distinguish between specifically religious conversions and conversions of other kinds. The religiosity of an institution is whatever distinguishes it from other institutions (political institutions like states, or social institutions like clubs) in such a way as to allow us to classify it as religious. The religiosity of a person is whatever is special about them that allows us to properly call them ‘religious’, as in ‘Peter is religious’. Part of what might be involved in calling a person ‘religious’ is that they belong to a ‘religion’, and part of what it means to call something a ‘religion’ is that its members are ‘religious’. Thus these concepts are linked. While linked, these concepts of religiousness are logically distinct because a person could (in principle) be religious without belonging to a religious institution and conversely could belong to a religious institution without being religious. I will use the term ‘religiosity’ to include both the religiousness of institutions and the religiousness of individuals.

In discussing religiosity, I will take the opportunity to examine various philosophical approaches to the problems of definition, starting from the Socratic idea of a common essence shared by all and only instances of the definiendum, and will examine some particular definitions of religiosity offered in the literature on religion. I conclude that attempts to define the concept fail, and show that a more flexible approach is needed to adequately explain the concept of religiosity. The approach I adopt is inspired by the fluid approach to language that is found most famously in Wittgenstein. With this ‘family resemblance’ view as a starting point, I offer a view that takes into account contemporary research on linguistic vagueness and context-sensitivity. I claim that the term ‘religious’ is vague, but is not thereby unusable. I will also show that some religious language should be seen as context-sensitive so that its meaning changes depending on the linguistic context. Thus, given that a person’s linguistic context changes when one undergoes a conversion, part of what a conversion involves will be a change in the meaning of one’s language. I conclude that we can pick out cases of religiousness whenever we have sufficient contextual information, but may struggle to do so otherwise.

The overall goal of the chapter will be to show that there is no single set of necessary and sufficient conditions for religious conversion – the features one gains or loses in the process of conversion cannot be specified in this way. Thus, the definitional approach fails. However, I maintain that there are some things that play a part in many or most instances of religious conversion, although in different ways and
to different degrees. This alleviates the concern that might be raised that without a definition we cannot successfully apply the term – in fact, the context can help to guide our application of the term even when some features are absent or diminished. The claim that certain features are usually present in religious conversion will lead us forward to the idea that there are three highly significant ‘dimensions’ of conversion, each of which will be explored in turn in the three subsequent chapters.

1.1. Conversion.

Many people hold that conversion produces ‘not a change but a revolution in character’, 3 which captures the weight of significance implied by the term ‘conversion’: merely minor or insignificant changes will not be sufficient to count as conversion. I will introduce some of the changes that are typically associated with conversion. Such changes should be significant in some key way or ways, reflecting the import of the term ‘conversion’, and justifying the application of the term ‘conversion’ rather than merely growth, development, change, or shift, or other less extreme terms. I will consider the nature of conversion through the lens of an analogy with scientific revolutions. Through this, I begin to develop a model of conversion on which converting involves a paradigm shift.


William James gives an account of religious conversion 4 that proceeds from his empirical research, in particular, from elaborately detailed case studies of religious converts. 5 He introduces a psychological concept that I will call the ‘mental field thesis’. We could think of a ‘mental field’ as the domain of things that might become present to an individual’s awareness at any one time or be unconsciously active at that time. We can think of the mental field through a spatial metaphor: the field has a

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4 He understands conversion as ‘the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities.’ James, William, The Varieties of Religious Experience - A Study in Human Nature, [1902], Pennsylvania State University, Electronic Classics Series, (2002), p. 188.
5 This is an application of his general philosophical methodology, as he says: ‘one can see no farther into a generalization than just so far as one’s previous acquaintance with particulars enables one to take it in’. James, p. 214. (Citing Professor Agassiz.)
centre, and a periphery, and there is also space which counts as being beyond the field altogether. Within this mental field some objects of thought or attention will be central, and others will be peripheral – still within the field, but less pertinent and less easy to access. The state of our mental field changes, and ‘[a]s our mental fields succeed one another, each has its centre of interest, around which the objects of which we are less and less attentively conscious fade to a margin so faint that its limits are unassignable.’ Certain things will be part of an individual’s mental field at one time but not at another, or will move between the centre and periphery of his consciousness. For example, when I am in a supermarket, the location of the fruit aisle may be in the forefront of my mind and my weekly food budget in the periphery, but these things are very unlikely to even be in the peripheral reaches of my consciousness when I am in a job interview, or taking a philosophy exam. In general we expect that anything relevant to current interests and aims will be central and anything that bears on or connects to the current context in any way will be peripheral. There is no hard and fast rule here – of course, one may find oneself daydreaming about fruit during a philosophy exam, even though this is likely to be detrimental to one’s aims and interests in such a context. We can see my general guideline more as an ‘ideal’ than a descriptive claim.

When in a particular context or mode, certain things are more salient, certain behaviours are more germane, and we are more likely to use certain language, make certain assumptions, and ignore/focus on different things. For example, when I read a philosophy paper I will be more likely to focus on the structure of a sentence and its logical implications than I will be when I read light fiction. Engineers notice different aspects of a product than its consumers do. I may be inclined as a professional amongst peers to use technical jargon that I wouldn’t use in non-professional contexts, and in my hometown I might use colloquialisms I wouldn’t use elsewhere. Most of the changes of focus and shifts of salience that we undergo each day are not to be thought of as ‘transformative’ because they are all short lived (albeit often recurring), and do not exclude other modes of being, or dramatically change the pattern of our lives. Many things can account for a temporary shift, and James says the phenomenon is partly due to ‘explicitly conscious processes of thought and will, but is due largely also to the subconscious incubation and maturing of motives

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deposited by the experiences of life.’ This idea of subconscious incubation is an interesting one — it means that something that seems insignificant at the time that it is experienced may actually have a cumulative influence in conjunction with later experiences, or in light of new experiences can seem much more significant.

Each individual has certain modes that are more ingrained, permanent, and frequently adopted. James refers to these as ‘the habitual centre of his personal energy’. When one is occupying an unfamiliar mode, there is a greater propensity towards feeling out of one’s ‘comfort zone’ and considering things on the far periphery of our mental field involves greater cognitive effort. Individuals with wider mental fields are likely to be more intelligent and capable, being able to make associations across a wider field of subjects and draw connections between related theories and suchlike with greater ease. We all experience shifts in the habitual centre of our personal energy when we engage in certain things. For instance, the process of training may be thought of as bringing certain things deliberately into the centre of one’s mental field so as to permanently shift the habitual centre of personal energy. Sometimes less deliberately, there is sometimes also a shift when certain aspects of our life circumstances change in a significant way, for instance, if we move to a new city and pick up the slang, or we take up a new subject and begin integrating the methods and terms into our thought patterns. When we are in the midst of anything immersive, from child rearing to a long-term research project, this will be at the forefront of our mind almost all of the time, and will pop up and invite connection to almost any seemingly unrelated thing.

When there is oscillation, we have what James calls a ‘wavering and divided self’. However, when there is a radical and more permanent alteration, ‘whenever one aim grows so stable as to expel definitively its previous rivals from the individual’s life’, as James puts it, then ‘we tend to speak of the phenomenon, and perhaps to wonder at it, as a “transformation.”’ Such transformations are involved when we talk about conversion: when one comes ‘to lie permanently within a certain

\[\text{\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{8} When we turn to the dynamics of the conversion process in §5.1 we’ll see more directly how a single and seemingly trivial experience can allow for another small incremental change, which cumulatively, leads to the possibility of wide-scale changes, and hence conversion can be made possible by even a small shift.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, p. 194.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, p. 193.}\]
system; and then, if the change be a religious one, we call it a conversion’.  
To conclude this point, we might understand a religious conversion as a process whereby the habitual centre of a person’s energy permanently shifts to a more religious one.

Giving an account of conversion based on inner events like the shift in mental field just described seems to make it susceptible to the objection that conversion would be difficult to measure and to ascribe. A ‘shift in the centre of personal energy’ is not going to be determinable even by a sincere first-person report, since even if a person is self-aware enough to recognise which things are more salient than others, being able to reliably rank these things over a long enough period of time will be much harder. Indeed, it may be impossible, since when certain things cease to be salient they may not even be noticed or remembered, so cannot be compared or accounted for in this way.

James’s method of overcoming this concern is to focus on the outward criteria of these inner events, by thinking about specifiable results we would expect in genuine conversions. His pragmatic approach focuses on concrete outcomes that, when present, allow us to claim that something counts as a genuine conversion rather than not. For James, these outcomes are not merely symptomatic of a conversion, but actually constitute it. Whenever we understand the meaning of a term, or a concept, we know the criteria for its application, and ‘what we discover in the course of [grammatical] investigation, when we ask, “[u]nder what circumstances, or in what particular cases, do we say…?”, are our criteria.’ So if we understand the term ‘conversion’, we know the criteria for its application, and we can elucidate these criteria by answering the question of under what circumstances we apply the term.

Let us focus on a case of religious conversion. My sister says that she has had a religious conversion. It may not, as the first objection claimed, be possible to know whether this is the case on the basis of a shift in salience patterns, or in the mental

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12 Ibid, p. 194. In the next section I’ll discuss what it is for a change to count as ‘religious’.  
13 Ibid, pp. 242-3. The elements we would expect are: a sense of well-being and harmony; the perception of previously unknown truths (which he says will often/usually be ineffable); a new and more beatific way of seeing the world.
15 The notion of a ‘criterion’ can be contrasted with the notion of a ‘symptom’, which is something that we have learnt from experience coincides with the criteria. For instance, it is a criterion for tonsillitis that there is a certain bacillus present, and it is a symptom of tonsillitis that the patient has an inflamed throat: ‘Then to say “A man has [tonsillitis] if this bacillus is found in him” is a tautology or it is a loose way of stating the definition of [tonsillitis]’. But to say, “A man has [tonsillitis] whenever he has an inflamed throat” is to make an hypothesis’. Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Blue and Brown Books*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd Ed., (1969), p. 25. Wittgenstein refers to ‘angina’, but for consistency and correctness I have edited this to ‘tonsillitis’ in square brackets.
field. These are still interesting, and we will come to see in the remainder of the thesis that the change in mental field is linked with changes in various other dimensions that can be outwardly measured. What we note as having changed in my sister’s case is that she now believes that God exists, loves him, and is joyful more often. She has started going to church, consolidating friendships with other religious people, donating to the poor, and praying on a daily basis. When we ordinarily apply the term, these are the sorts of things that we have in mind, so without assuming any specific set of criteria at this point, we seem to have a plausible candidate for meeting the outward criteria for having had a conversion. If the criteria are met, then we say that there really has been a genuine conversion, and otherwise we don’t.

Yet the sceptic might claim that even when the criteria are present she may still not have had a conversion: she could be faking. This threatens to undermine the criteria as useful, as their presence wouldn’t be able to reliably tell us whether someone has had a conversion or not. Yet, as Cavell notes, ‘to accommodate that fact, to make the fact comprehensible, even, one could say, to state that fact, one has to say something like, “He was pretending; rehearsing a part; he was hypnotized…”’ An easy way out would be to claim that should any of these explanations be appropriate, then the criteria simply were not met. ‘But this is empty. For now we can preserve the certainty of the connection between a criterion and what it is a criterion of only at the price of never knowing with certainty that the criterion is satisfied…’ A different way of preserving the usefulness of criteria is required.

One such way would be to point out that ‘feigning’ and ‘mocking’ have criteria of their own. Often it will be obvious when the criteria are not properly satisfied because we can identify such cases. We can only identify cases of not meeting the criteria genuinely (as we do in cases of feigning) if we know what the real deal looks like too. We are in no doubt that a person is not sincere when, on a hot day in a long queue they say with an over-animated smile and a strong emphasis: ‘You know, I just love waiting around all day.’ We can identify this as a case of sarcasm, and we do so by knowing both the criteria for a sincere utterance of this sentence, and how this utterance diverges from it using conventions that commonly indicate sarcasm. We learn what these various special circumstances are as part of our

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16 Cavell, p. 40.
17 Ibid, p. 41.
18 Ibid, p. 43.
development of language; understanding criteria is necessary both for understanding the words, and understanding the behaviours themselves.\textsuperscript{19} When someone meets the criterion for pain it is not always reasonable to claim that it is pretence: ‘if over months you observe someone suffering from an obvious injury that may even prove fatal in the end, it would be plain ridiculous to insist that this might have been just a pretence.’\textsuperscript{20} This applies to how I could identify pretence in my sister’s case. Since I am familiar with her moods, behaviour patterns, acting skills, sense of humour, and so on, I’d have a case that would be as good as any could be for a verdict on whether the criteria are genuinely met, or were being utilised for pretence. In this case, given that my sister has always been terrible liar and not an especially talented actress, and has no motivation for deception in any case, I am well placed to claim that the lack of typical markers for pretence is a sign that there is no pretence. The sustained effort and intricacy of a pretence that lasted a lifetime, for no apparent reason, cannot sensibly be called pretence.

Even if/when my sister is feigning some aspect of a conversion, we can only tell that what she is feigning is \textit{conversion} by knowing that these are the criteria that indicate that phenomenon rather than another. As Cavell puts it (discussing the case of pain) ‘\textit{what} he is feigning must be precisely pain … These circumstances are ones in appealing to which, in describing which, we retain the concept (here, of pain) whose application these criteria determine.’\textsuperscript{21} It is because we have a full understanding of the concept and the criteria of pain that we are able to make judgments about when certain behaviours are simulating pain-behaviour, and when they are not pain-behaviours at all. Cavell puts it well when he says:

Criteria are “criteria for something’s being so”, not in the sense that they tell us of a thing’s existence, but of something like its identity, not of its \textit{being} so, but of its being \textit{so}.\textsuperscript{22}

Here we might distinguish these two senses of ‘being so’ as follows. Something \textit{being} so is an existential sense, claiming that something is in existence. Something being \textit{so} is a predicative sense, where it is being claimed that something (existent or non-
existent) is a certain way. When it is claimed that criteria are ‘criteria for something’s being so’ in the predicative (rather than existential) sense, this means that criteria cannot infallibly tell us what is the case, i.e. we cannot go from the criteria of pain to a certainty of the presence of pain in a metaphysical way. But this does not alter the fact that whenever there is pain, the criteria tell us what things will be the case.

Given that the satisfaction of the criteria for religious conversion ensure the suitability of applying the concept of ‘undergoing a religious conversion’, as the discussion so far has claimed, the presence of the criteria are enough to apply the concept. So although there may sometimes be cases of faking, in the case under discussion, where my sister satisfies the criteria of having had a religious conversion, she has had a religious conversion, and if one stipulates that she hasn’t had a conversion, one is merely distorting the meaning of the term ‘religious conversion’ beyond that with which we are familiar.23

The objection that we cannot apply the term ‘conversion’ based on the presence of inner events was countered by claiming that we can do so by the presence of outward events. As the inner events are conceptually linked to the outwards events and are criteria for the application of the concept, we can apply the term ‘conversion’ whenever the criteria are met. I considered a further objection to this proposal, namely that the criteria can be met when someone is faking, and so the concept should not really be applied even though the criteria are met. This was countered by noting that the concept does apply in the sense that we use the criteria to ascertain that what is being faked is precisely that concept, and that there are also criteria that allow us to ascertain when something is a pretence and when it is not.

This section has aimed to show that there are inner characteristics of conversion that involve shifts in salience patterns and in the Jamesean mental field, and that we ordinarily attribute a conversion to those who exhibit certain features we take as criteria for the application of that term. What exactly these are will be explored later in the thesis. Now, I’ll elaborate on the conversion phenomenon by analogy with scientific revolutions, which I claim can add a fruitful layer to our understanding of conversion.

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23 Cf. Cavell’s: ‘[I]f that isn’t – if he isn’t having – a toothache, I don’t know what a toothache is.’ (p. 69).
1.1.2. An analogy between conversion and paradigm shifts.

In normal scientific progress there is an accepted methodology and a set of background and explicit assumptions and beliefs against which new hypotheses are tested. Hypotheses will be considered true when they are verifiable using the accepted scientific method and are compatible with and supported by the accepted assumptions and beliefs. If new hypotheses are found to be unverifiable or incompatible with other verifiable theses, they will be rejected or amended. Thus ordinary scientific progress is cumulative and non-revisionary. When one occupies a non-religious standpoint, one uses the assumptions that come along with this standpoint to assess and integrate religious phenomena. For example, one might reduce religious experiences to scientifically explainable mental processes, without reference to a transcendent being.

The background against which ordinary scientific progress is made is called a ‘paradigm’ by Kuhn, and this is described by Bird as a ‘strong commitment by the relevant scientific community to their shared theoretical beliefs, values, instruments and techniques, and even metaphysics.’

One’s paradigm is a complex network, and a single datum that conflicts with some aspect of the network is more likely to be explained away, rejected as an anomaly, or even ignored, than taken as a legitimate challenge to the paradigm. In a pragmatic sense, this is prudent to avoid minor mistakes taking up lots of time and energy and detracting from more important concerns. If every anomaly were treated as potentially foundation-shaking, much less progress would or could be made. In cases where there is a small anomaly in a well-established paradigm ‘[t]he decision to opt for a revision of a disciplinary matrix is not one that is rationally compelled; nor is the particular choice of revision rationally compelled.’

Scientific paradigms can be maintained for years, decades, or even centuries, with anomalous data being accounted for in all manner of ways, sometimes in extreme and implausible ways. However, sometimes the accumulation of anomalous data reaches a tipping point where it can no longer be ignored. Or at other times, one single new datum is overwhelming and, though inconsistent with the existing paradigm, cannot be ignored. There may be a loss of confidence in the paradigm at

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25 Ibid.
this point, which Kuhn calls a ‘crisis of confidence’.\textsuperscript{26} A possible response to the new datum/data will be increased motivation to engage with the topic creatively in order to reduce or resolve the cognitive dissonance that will be experienced. One outcome of such efforts might be the detection of a pattern in the anomalous data, or an idea that can form the basis for a new understanding of the territory that radically undermines some previously accepted aspect of the current paradigm. When this happens, we call it a ‘revolution’, and a new paradigm replaces the old. Thus, we can understand a Kuhnian scientific revolution as involving a paradigm shift, where some aspect of the paradigm changes, which requires a radical revision of previously accepted facts, methods, or standards. Scientific revolutions aren’t cumulative, and are revisionary.\textsuperscript{27}

Returning to our analogy with religious conversion, something like ‘anomalous data’ is encountered when one has a religious experience or witnesses a miracle, which may undermine the individual’s existing paradigm, for example by contravening the laws of nature. It may also be interesting to note that the majority of conversions occur at times of great distress – when an alcoholic ‘hits rock bottom’, when a loved one dies, when one narrowly avoids death, as well as during adolescence: another kind of crisis.\textsuperscript{28} These may also be the times when individuals are the least cognitively proficient, so it would not be an unexpected result if it turned out that individuals at such times would be less likely to be able to find a place in their current paradigm for something seemingly anomalous (although I am not aware of any research that may have been conducted that could illuminate this). When a crisis of confidence in one’s worldview requires one to make sense of the conflicting datum, the ‘territory’ might shift in a way similar to the shift that is experienced when one stops seeing a duck here, and sees a rabbit instead: \textsuperscript{29}

![Duck Rabbit](image)

Try now to flip a few times between seeing this as a duck, then a rabbit. It is

\textsuperscript{27} Bird, ‘Kuhn’.
\textsuperscript{28} Christensen, C.W., ‘Religious Conversion in Adolescence’, Pastoral Psychology, (Sept., 1965). See also James, p. 197 and pp. 209-10.
\textsuperscript{29} It isn’t clear (and Kuhn himself was not sure) whether the duck rabbit case is ‘just an analogy or whether it illustrated some more general truth about the way the mind works that encompasses the scientific case too.’ (Bird, ‘Kuhn’. Emphasis added.)
quite likely that this involved a small movement of the centre of your focus: for myself, focussing towards the left I see the rabbit, while moving my focus towards the right I see a duck. Interestingly, I also see a duck more readily than a rabbit, although I have reason to think it may be different for different people. This shift in focus is analogous to the shift in what is at the centre of your mental field. It is not only a metaphorical claim that shifting one’s attention to a different thing will result in seeing things in a different way, and this thought will be taken up further in later chapters.

There are some disanalogies between the experience of the duckrabbit and the kind of Gestalt switch that we experience in a conversion or revolution. Firstly, we can flip backwards and forwards between viewing the image above as a duck and as a rabbit (it is harder to view it as a duckrabbit). Flipping backwards and forwards between the religious and non-religious perspectives in this way can occur through experiences of empathy with another’s worldview, but it is not as simple and easy as in the duckrabbit case because the religious and non-religious world-views are not simple single line images. In this sense we are dealing with something closer to a mandala than a duckrabbit. Secondly, nothing much else changes when I see a duck rather than a rabbit, while the conversion or revolution case involves far more widespread and radical shifts. One change in our worldview, one Gestalt switch, can instigate wide scale revision: a change in scientific paradigm may have consequences for technology, engineering, ethics, politics, law, and many other areas of life in greater or lesser ways. In the life of religious convert too the results will be far-reaching: as will become clearer in subsequent chapters, even something as simple as a change in one single belief, will have implications for emotions, behaviours, and other beliefs too (among other things) and these changes in turn trigger further changes, and this may continue until the resemblance to the starting position is faint.

Consider Salvador Dali’s ‘Gala Contemplating The Mediterranean Sea Which At Twenty Meters Becomes The Portrait Of Abraham Lincoln’:

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If you were to stand close to the picture, you would see a woman standing in front of a window. If you were to stand at twenty meters distance you could see the image as a picture of Lincoln. (For the same effect, squint or cross your eyes and look at Fig. 1.) This image can also be used to illustrate the notion of a Gestalt switch. At first one part of the painting is seen as Gala’s arm, but at a certain distance it becomes Lincoln’s nose. At first one group of pixels is seen as Gala’s head, but then it becomes Lincoln’s eye. Once you are standing at the required distance, this switch has occurred, it no longer makes sense to see the painting in the old way, and from that distance it may no longer be possible. Once certain parts of the image are viewed differently we are no longer free to see the image in certain other ways. Once we start viewing part of the picture in a certain way, it can no longer function as part of the old pattern. Just as, while a convert remembers what their life used to be like, they no longer have the same view of it. Once you are seeing the image as the face of Lincoln, you no longer see the window, the woman, or the sun. When you are standing close to this painting, you need to walk some distance for your perspective to change, and this ‘walk’ is part of what I shall be exploring in this thesis. How does one take these steps, and what must happen along the way? This will be the focus of subsequent chapters of the thesis.
An advantage of this picture of conversion as analogous with scientific revolution, or with a paradigm shift, is that it can also help to answer the question of how to distinguish between conversion and mere growth (which may be analogous to ordinary scientific progress). One thing that makes the distinction more challenging to draw is that conversions can be extended over longer periods of time, and can be ‘prepared for by conditions which extend over a long period’, so it seems that the distinguishing mark cannot simply be a temporal difference: it might not always be the case that conversions are sudden while growth is gradual. Yet, as Ferguson points out, the fact that conversions can extend over time just as growth does, ‘invites the supposition that since the process is extended it must, therefore, not be radically different from the process of growth: Conversion is gradual; growth is gradual; therefore, conversion equals growth. (One would think that the distinguishing marks should be associated, not with duration but with dynamics).’ Ferguson is right to claim that the difference between growth and conversion is one of dynamics. On my view the dynamics of growth will be more like ordinary scientific progress, where new beliefs can cumulate and connections between them can be added, but without challenging the paradigm already in place. The dynamics of conversion will involve a paradigm shift; potentially triggered by something like a Gestalt switch and in this sense will be more like a revolution.

1.2. The nature of religiosity.

The Socratic approach to understanding what ‘religiosity’ is might be to discover through the dialectic ‘what feature all and only religions share in virtue of which they are religions’. I shall consider the attempts that have been made to provide (non-circular and substantive) definitions of ‘religious’ and ‘religion’. My prognosis for this method is that most definitions limiting themselves to the prominent characteristics of only one major religion or to one feature of religion will be deficient, because religiosity is a diverse phenomenon. On the other hand, definitions that attempt to capture all of these diversities by being more general will thereby include things that are not religious at all. Moreover, religiosity is an evolving

31 Ibid.
32 Stone, p. 337.
phenomenon. Thus any rigid definition will capture only a synchronic perspective of something that should be treated diachronically, and will be a merely a still frame of a moving picture. I argue in the next section that a single definition cannot be provided. By reference to specific examples I shall show that they fail on one or more of three counts: they are circular; they do not include all of the necessary conditions; or they do not provide sufficient conditions. I shall then conduct a post-mortem on this kind of approach, explaining why the definitionalist project fails.

1.2.1. The inadequacy of definitions of religiosity.

Definitions of a term attempt to capture necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of that term. The provision of a definition would thereby allow one to either apply or withhold the term from any particular instance by measuring against the definition. Pihlström argues that attempts to demarcate religiosity in this way are committed to essentialism, which means that the application of the term would depend on certain essential ‘religious-making’ properties being present. He says:

If such an essentialist view were true an explicit definition of religion would be a meaningful goal, and its possibility would be a necessary presupposition of any normative discussion of religion and religiosity, If, however, no essentialism is invoked, or if essentialism is rejected as a hopelessly outdated form of metaphysics, then the question arises whether any religion vs. pseudo-religion (or religion vs. superstition) boundary can be drawn at all.\footnote{Pihlström, Sami, ‘Religion and Pseudo-Religion: An Elusive Boundary’, \textit{International Journal for Philosophy of Religion}, Vol. 62, No. 1 (Aug., 2007), p. 4.}

I agree that for a successful definition to be possible it would be a requirement for there to be features that would enable us to distinguish things of the ‘religious’ type from other types without such features, and that if there is no essential feature, then definitions will fail.

It might be the case that ‘the term “religion” does not pick out phenomena that are naturally grouped together. In other words, religions do not possess some common defining feature that the term “religion” picks out.’\footnote{As quoted in Harrison, V.S., ‘The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World’, p. 139.} Rather, ‘the various religions do

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\footnote{As quoted in Harrison, V.S., ‘The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World’, p. 139.}
not have any defining features, or essence, in common’.\textsuperscript{35} If this is the case, this doesn’t make the search for definitions inexplicable, or even futile. It is a natural human tendency to try to impose this rigour onto the world. And through the project of testing various definitions one may clarify the concept by highlighting useful sub-groups of what might count as religious by showing that certain religions share a certain group of features and not others. However, it would be a mistake to insist that there must be a definition or to apply a blanket definition that is unsuccessful. Wittgenstein advises well when he says: ‘Don’t say: ‘There must be something common…’—but \textit{look and see}’.\textsuperscript{36} I will spend the remainder of this section looking and seeing, and this will give us more reason to reject the essentialist thesis than to accept it. I will argue that despite this, we can still successfully draw boundaries between the religious and non-religious, despite this not being achieved in the manner essentialists have attempted.

I claimed that definitions typically fail for one of several reasons: they are circular; they admit too much; or they admit too little. The least interesting definitions are those that are tautological or circular, for instance this definition, which Shrubsole calls ‘one of the least illuminating of modern definitions’:\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{quote}
The true essence of religion is found in the religiosity or religious frame of mind [which is] the aggregate of all those phenomena which are invariably termed religious in contradistinction to ethical, aesthetical, political and others.”\textsuperscript{38}
\end{quote}

This gives no indication of what actually distinguishes the religious from the ethical, aesthetical, or political, merely claiming that the essence of religion is in its religiosity, or religious frame of mind. If this were expanded on it might avoid circularity, but here the only hint is that this involves phenomena that are termed ‘religious’.

Some definitions include too little, by ruling out things that we want to call religious from counting as religious. Some specific faiths offer definitions of religiosity that focus on what membership to that specific faith involved. For

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 141.
\textsuperscript{36} Wittgenstein, \textit{Philosophical Investigations}, §66.
example: ‘Religion is the belief in an ever living God.’ Definitions of this type, that accurately define some specific religion or part of a religion, sect, denomination, tradition, or religious standpoint may well be useful in the context of that group, as a way of highlighting or demarcating what is important and unique about that particular group. However, even if such ‘narrow’ definitions are accurate in this narrow domain, the aim of this thesis is not to capture merely what is specific to a particular group, but is rather to achieve a higher degree of generality. This definition would rule out by fiat any polytheistic religion (whose adherents would not accept a single God), as well as any religion that does not include belief in any God, for example Daoism and Buddhism. It also rules out certain forms of Judaism where such a belief is not regarded as essential for being a practising member of the religion, since ‘for the Jew, religion cannot be so easily identified with the affirmation of a given content of belief.’ Therefore it is not inclusive enough, and does not express a necessary condition, so is not acceptable as a general definition of religiosity. One may attempt to justify this exclusion, but this is likely to be arbitrary or ad hoc unless reasons can be offered that don’t stem from the assumption that their chosen faith is the only real faith. People of different faiths wouldn’t accept justifications of this type.

An example of a definition that includes too much is the following: ‘we might define religion as the instinct which impels all beings to seek that which is regarded as best’ As ‘what is best’ is something that needs further unpacking it could also be construed so as to include all manner of things as religious, for example Olympic sports, which aim at what is best in terms of human physical ability. Another example is, ‘a practice that expresses and advances the ultimate concern of a large number of people’ Then, as Jim Stone points out, the stock market and the drug trade would count as religions. Another is that the ‘essence of religion consists in the feeling of

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41 This can have important consequences. For instance, in America during World War II, many people were refused exemption from fighting on conscientious grounds because the government did not recognise their religion as genuine according to accepted definitions. These were, notably, people from Quaker or Hopi faiths, and for many of these people the definitional question meant a choice between being compelled to fight in a war they could not support and imprisonment for desertion if they upheld their pacifism.
42 Shrubsole, p. 411.
44 Ibid.
absolute dependence.’ According to Freud this conflates the cause of religion with the meaning of ‘religion’. Additionally, the feeling in question could be shared by those who feel we depend on the natural world, and to a lesser extent, people who are absolutely dependent on other people due to illness or disability. Another definition that has been offered is: ‘a religion is a conceptual system that provides an interpretation of the world and the place of human beings in it, bases an account of how life should be lived given that interpretation, and expresses this interpretation and lifestyle in a set of rituals, institutions and practices.’ But this doesn’t rule out Maoism (or other political systems that involve public ceremonies and rituals.)

Some definitions occupy the unfortunate position of failing on both of the above counts, for instance that religion is ‘a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man’. Not all religions serve this function, for instance Buddhism. This also includes as religious things we may wish to exclude, such as paying bribes to a superior extra-terrestrial race of oppressors, which would meet this definition. Another example is that ‘a religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.’ This rules in Marxism, which meets all of these requirements, and rules out Quakerism, which does not incorporate symbols in this way.

Definitions of ‘the religious person’ have often taken some definition of religion as prior to it, and then the religious person is simply defined in terms of their connection to a ‘religion’. Harrison contends that ‘two criteria of religiosity have been widely regarded as individually necessary and jointly sufficient: if a person was (1) affiliated to a religious institution, and (2) held religious beliefs, then he or she could be classified as ‘religious’ as opposed to ‘nonreligious’.’ This is problematic because the first criterion rules out anyone who does not have a particular institutional affiliation, more isolated individuals, or those who reject the mainstream religion in

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45 Schleiermacher, as cited in Alston, ‘Religion’, p. 141.
48 Frazer, as cited in Alston, ‘Religion’, p. 140.
their society, even if such people have religious beliefs, feelings, and a religious identity and lifestyle. A study has shown that while only fifteen percent of the British population actively participate in institutional religion, ‘between two-thirds and three-quarters of British people indicate fairly consistently that they believe in some sort of God’.\textsuperscript{51} So it seems that requiring religious affiliation will neglect the fifty to sixty percent of British people who have religious beliefs but aren’t affiliated with a religious institution. Likewise, some people consider themselves religious despite not having expressible religious beliefs, for example some mystics and those affiliated to religious institutions that do not emphasise religious beliefs, and those whose religious life centres on praxis, and affective rather than intellectual aspects of religiosity. This strongly suggests that religious affiliation and religious beliefs are inadequate as criteria for identifying what makes someone religious, since they rule out many people who we would intuitively want to call religious.

One criterion that might distinguish religious from non-religious people is sincere self-affirmation – indeed, ‘Many have concluded that the only possible criterion of whether a person is religious or not is whether or not that person says that she is.’\textsuperscript{52} A consequence of this would be that anyone sincerely claiming to be religious or non-religious would be so, even if this seems very counter-intuitive to everyone else. Thus we would need to contend that some kinds of Buddhism do not constitute a religion because their members do not see their brand of Buddhism as a ‘religion’ nor themselves as ‘religious’. For example, there is a movement with meditation centres all over the world that are explicitly Buddhist, communicate the teachings of Buddha, practice meditation to develop Samadhi and Panya (concentration and wisdom) along with Sila (morality, as outlined in the Buddhist eightfold path) and yet also explicitly say that they are ‘non-sectarian’, ‘scientific’, with no ‘meaningless rites and rituals’ and do not self-describe as religious.\textsuperscript{53} It would also be a consequence of taking self-ascription as definitive that the man who founded ‘Pastafarianism’ and worships ‘The Spaghetti Monster’ would count as authentically religious just as much as Christians who worship the God of traditional theism.\textsuperscript{54} One

\textsuperscript{52} Harrison, ‘On Defining the Religious Person’, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{53} S.N. Goenka, Vipassana meditation discourse given at Dhamma Dipa meditation center, UK.
\textsuperscript{54} This example is taken from the media: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstpics/howaboutthat/8635624/Pastafarian-wins-religious-freedom-right-to-wear-pasta-strainer-for-driving-licence.html
may claim that this man is not sincere, but many others clearly are, even if this sincerest is the product of obvious delusion. This problem can only be avoided if it is possible that a person might be irreligious when they sincerely claim to be religious and might be religious when they sincerely claim not to be, so ‘even an outright denial of religious identity may not constitute decisive evidence that a person is irreligious’.  

There are several further problems with taking self-affirmation as a criterion for being religious. Firstly, there is an epistemological problem arising from the fact that it will be hard to know in all cases whether a self-declaration of religiosity is sincere. Secondly, there is a problem about equivocation, in that we cannot be sure that those who affirm they are religious will be using the term ‘religious’ in the same way. Someone may use the term in a restricted way. For example, someone might say they are not religious because they do not adhere to the religion of their parents or community, or because they do not observe it with the strictness of others they deem paradigmatic of the ‘religious man’. Schleiermacher thinks that some people take themselves to be non-religious because they reject formal doctrines and institutions but that they might nevertheless be religious. In this case they would have miscategorised themselves because they were working with an impoverished account of religiosity.

The third and most difficult problem arises if it is possible that a person could be mistaken about their religiosity. That people can lack self-knowledge and can fall prey to self-deception suggests that they could. One might fail to ascribe religiosity to oneself in the same fashion we might expect someone to be unaware that they are boring, or be unable to admit to themselves that they have an addiction. A person might uncritically claim to be religious when they think that this is pious and desirable despite not exhibiting the features typically associated with religiosity, or they might declare they are not religious as in their circle agnosticism is fashionable, but hold beliefs ‘that make it very difficult to accept her denial’.

56 These semantic issues will be explored further in §1.2.3.
58 See §§2.1 and 3.2 respectively for defense of these points.
59 Harrison, ‘On Defining the Religious Person’, p. 247. Bréchon claims that a significant number of those who declared themselves to be without a religion nevertheless claimed to be committed to such quintessentially religious objects of belief as the existence of God, life after death and miracles.’ Harrison, ‘On Defining the Religious Person’, p. 246-7.
be some religious-making feature or features that a person can possess without their knowledge, or at least, that there may be a feature that is definitive independently of self-attribution. Self-attribution, then, is neither necessary nor sufficient to classify someone as religious, or their institution as religion. While self-attribution may be an interesting thing to study for its own sake, as a guide of whether someone is religious, it will be unreliable.

So far, then, none of the attempts to give a definition or criterion for religiosity have been successful. One might be tempted to think at this juncture that the problem is not with definition per se, but with trying to provide one overarching definition for all religions. It might alleviate the problem faced by some of the definitions considered here, as well as others not considered, to claim that ‘religion’ is too broad a term to define, as it encompasses sub-categories within this catchall. There are, some have contended, distinctly different types of religiosity, each of which might have a separate definition. Thus the problem with finding a definition that encompasses enough but not too much can be solved by instead dividing the loose term into several more specific ones and trying to define those. The definitions we have considered may fail to capture the general concept but may adequately define one of these types.

Typologies have been put forward that may be able to show that the kinds of definitions explored above usually do quite well at defining one of these types. These types are not always mutually exclusive as some can be applied conjunctively, so the typologies are not always competing explanations but merely explanations focussing on different features (this will become clearer with examples in the following discussion). One typology is the separation of the religious phenomenon into broad categories of intellectual, affective, and behavioural components. Victoria Harrison has a typology of this kind, and she calls the categories ‘intellectual’, ‘affective’, and ‘functional’. 60 William Alston also proceeds in a similar way, although his terminology is somewhat different. He calls his categories, ‘prophetic’, ‘mystical’ and ‘sacramental’. The prophetic type locates the divine in human manifestations, for example Mohammad or Jesus, plus in scripture that reveals the word of God. 61 The mystical type locates the divine in individual experiences. The emphasis is placed on

60 Harrison, ‘The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World’, p. 133. Harrison takes the first two types to be ‘religious’ definitions, and the third to be ‘non-religious’.

61 Alston, ‘Religion’, p. 144. Alston says that this type does incorporate both an intellectual, affective, and functional aspect.
asceticism and ‘contemplative discipline that will be conducive to the attainment and maintenance’\textsuperscript{62} of union with the divine. This seems to map roughly onto Harrison’s affective type. The sacramental type locates the divine in objects, for example totems, crucifixes, relics, and baptismal water. Here ‘the centre of religious activity will be found in ritual acts centring on these embodiments’.\textsuperscript{63} This roughly corresponds to Harrison’s functional type.

It is not likely that any particular religion will fall squarely into one of these types. Rather, these types will appear to some extent in most religions, but in different ways and to different degrees, and some religions will be a combination of only two of these types, or even only one. Alston claims that ‘Buddhism and philosophical Hinduism are predominantly mystical; Judaism, Islam, and Confucianism are primarily prophetic; and popular Hinduism, in company with all polytheistic and primitive religions, is primarily sacramental.’\textsuperscript{64} Thus definitions of a particular type of religion are unlikely to perfectly map onto our experience of religiosity either.

This result is in line with our practical experience of using the concept of religiosity, for when we try to decide whether an institution or person is religious, we don’t in fact go through a process of filtering it through a definition and seeing if it meets the definition or not; moreover, we may often use the term ‘religious’ in a variety of ways corresponding to an implicit understanding that there are different types of religion. Even when we are faced with what strikes us as a paradigm case of a religion, it may be clearer to us that it obviously counts as a religion, than that it meets any particular definition. While philosophy attempts to provide rigour, we should not apply rigour where doing so takes us further from, rather than closer to, the reality of the phenomenon we are interested in. The concluding thought of this section is that ‘there is no unmistakable class-mark distinctive of all true converts.’\textsuperscript{65} Definitions are merely commentaries on meaning. In the remainder of this chapter I will fill the hole left by the failed definitionalist project with some positive comments about the concept of religiosity, and will argue that what ‘religiosity’ \textit{means} is both flexible and dynamic, vague, and context-sensitive.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, pp. 144-5.
\textsuperscript{65} James, p. 234.
In reaction to an essentialist picture of language, Wittgenstein raised the thought that many concepts can be seen as ‘family resemblance’ concepts. The essentialist picture seems right in the case of concepts like ‘triangle’ where if there are three sides whose angles add up to 180° the concept applies, and not otherwise. It is not so straightforward with other concepts, for example ‘game’. On reflection it seems that there is no single feature that all games have in common. There are games with or without winners (chess, peek-a-boo), with or without teammates (hockey, solitaire), without or without boards/balls/rules (snakes and ladders, football, make-believe), and so on. Yet it is appropriate to call all these things games. While there is not a single feature they all have in common, there are nevertheless strands of similarity that run through all things that we call ‘games’. No feature is necessary, but some combinations of features will be jointly sufficient. Wittgenstein famously said this is like the resemblance between family members: while there is no single feature they all have in common (although they may all share certain features, for example eye colour) there will be things that the father has in common with his son but not his daughter, and in common with his grandson but not his son, and so on, so that there are threads of similarity on the basis of which we can see that they look like a family.

‘Religiosity’ can be understood as a family resemblance concept. As we have seen from various inadequate attempts at definition, it could well be that there is no feature that all religions or all religious people have in common. Nevertheless, there could still be features, some combinations of which are sufficient for religiosity. Seeing the matter in this way immediately undercuts many of the problems associated with definitional approaches. We no longer need to artificially constrain the concept to rule out things that do not seem religious, nor do we need to artificially broaden it in order to include things that do seem religious. Instead we can refer directly to those seemings and ask what features it has that seem specifically religious, that it might or might not share with other instances.

Stone makes an objection to this approach, saying that ‘the Wittgensteinian, faced with a borderline case of religion (for example secular humanism or Confucianism), can simply stipulate whether or not it is a religion. Where there can be

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no standard, there is no possibility of getting things wrong.' He follows this by stating: ‘On my account there is always a fact of the matter’. There is no argument given for his view except that it is able to provide this certainty, which is taken to be a benefit. However, he overlooks the sense in which a Wittgensteinian could allow the possibility of someone getting things wrong. For it would not be acceptable for someone to stipulate that something is a religion when it is clearly not one, nor is it necessarily enough to apply a concept on the basis of one single feature from a list of family resemblances. So there is a very real sense in which one is able to ‘get it wrong’ on the Wittgensteinian account, and in borderline cases the contested point is whether we are any more likely to get it wrong with a good guess based on our linguistic intuition and experience of religions, or by applying a stipulative definition.

The contentious area is over those examples for which it is not obvious whether the term ‘religious’ applies or not and these will naturally be the ones that most people find more challenging to classify: these are borderline cases. This difficulty is what Stone’s definition is supposed to alleviate, as this is exactly the situation in which a handy definition could help, because one could simply apply the definition to arbitrate between those with the definitional feature and those without. But what confidence can we have that applying this definition will give us the right result? Perhaps, contrary to Stone’s view of the matter, having this definition will lead one to apply it uncritically and blindly rule things in or out depending on its fit, and to gloss over important considerations not captured by the definition. Due consideration of each borderline case individually may well serve us better, and allow us to make room for the senses in which something is both like, and unlike, paradigm cases of religion. I therefore reply from the family resemblance corner that we need not make this retreat back to essentialism.

A second objection to the family resemblance proposal is that family resemblances are much harder to use than definitions to identify cases. What is to tell us which resemblances count, and in which combinations? There might be lots of things that resemble games, and share many features with other games, without

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67 Stone, p. 337.
68 Cf. ‘Can I say “bububu” and mean “If it doesn't rain I shall go for a walk”?—It is only in a language that I can mean something by something.’ Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, p. 18.
69 In the next section I argue that what may help determine whether a borderline case should count as a religion or not is the context in which the question arises, and that the context can also determine what standard one should use when applying or withholding the term.
themselves counting as games, for example cross country running, and formula one racing. Likewise, many things have many resemblances with religions, but are not clearly religious, like political world-views, secular humanism, and scientism. The fact that in some cases it will be hard to tell whether something is a religion or not is taken by the definitionalist as a reason that we need a criterion or definition, to neaten up these troublesome cases.\footnote{One might claim that the situation is so hopeless that we ought to give up the concept of religiosity altogether. ‘Timothy Fitzgerald argues that the fact that ‘religion’ has no clear meaning implies that there is no such thing as religion. According to Fitzgerald, people have failed to define religion because there are no genuine religious phenomena to identify. Purported religious phenomena are, he argues, the result of our imposing an artificial conceptual division between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ onto a world that does not exhibit any such distinction.’ Harrison, ‘The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World’, p. 144. Citation: Fitzgerald, Timothy, \textit{The Ideology of Religious Studies}, Oxford University Press, (2000), p. 6.}

The solution to this problem can be inspired by the following quotation from Wittgenstein: ‘Anyone with an eye for family resemblances can recognize that two people are related to each other, even without being able to say wherein the resemblance lies.’\footnote{Wittgenstein, Ludwig, \textit{Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology: Volume II}, Ed. G.H. von Wright and Heikki Nyman, University of Chicago Press, (1980), §551.} The above objection underestimates our ability as competent language users to know and understand when a term applies and when it does not, so the frequency with which this problem will arise is smaller than the objector might lead us to think (certainly not frequently enough to warrant abandoning the concept altogether). This is only part of the reply. The other part of the reply is to alleviate the concern in those genuine cases of uncertainty. One alternative may be to ‘accept that in some cases there will be no clear answer to the question of whether something is part of the family of religions or not.’\footnote{Harrison, ‘The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World’, p. 144. Harrison does not endorse the views she gives exegesis of here.} While the motivation driving the definitionalist to impose criteria may be understandable, it by no means shows that there are criteria to be had. On the contrary, we can see the situation of uncertainty in borderline cases as appropriate. Yet this uncertainty can be minimised, and in some cases resolved, by appealing to the vagueness of language, and to the mechanisms by which we determine meaning in cases of vagueness in many other cases. I will also argue that religious language is context-sensitive, and that having more contextual information will help when using the term, in that (among other things) contexts can sometimes make certain family resemblances obvious and can help to resolve whether
some borderline cases for the concept of religiosity should count in that particular context or not.

1.2.3. The occurrence of linguistic shifts.

In the previous section the problems with definition were brought to the fore. It was noted that we might find pragmatic value in using definitions for a specific purpose, as long as these definitions don’t become dogmatically applied when the purpose changes. For example, there are times when we want to highlight a difference between two related phenomena that might harmlessly be grouped together on some occasions. However, the very fact that our purposes change in this manner gives us a more general argument for the conclusion that the definitional project will fail. Namely, that some language (including the terms ‘religion’ and ‘religious’) is context-sensitive, and definitions cannot be flexible enough to cover all contexts.

An issue that was raised in the previous section was that it will sometimes be difficult to know when to apply the term ‘religious’ and, indeed, when it is correct to say that someone has become religious (that is, when someone has converted). Given that we are concerned with providing an account of religious conversion, this presents a potential problem. If you and I both say ‘I believe that God exists’: do we hold the same belief? If I say ‘God exists’ and you say ‘God does not exist’ do we disagree with each other? Importantly, it does seem as though we can use the term ‘religious’ (and other religious terms) in various ways without misusing the term. I can call someone a religious person and mean various things.

However, while this may seem problematic, this is a pervasive aspect of language use that is shared by many other predicates. As such the difficulties involved in understanding and applying specifically religious concepts will be no worse than for a large class of predicates. The class I’m thinking of is that of vague predicates. I will argue that many terms are in fact to be counted among the list of vague predicates, and by giving an account of vagueness on which these terms are still usable, I will conclude that we should neither abandon, nor artificially define, nor be especially troubled by the concept of religiosity.

I shall argue for the vagueness of religiosity by showing that it counts as vague according to three different commonly accepted criteria for vagueness. While these three options are not exhaustive, one of these three is adopted by almost all of those
involved in the debate over vagueness, so if religiosity counts as vague according to all three, this is strong grounds for the conclusion that it is to be counted as a vague predicate. The first criterion for vagueness is the possibility of faultless disagreement, the second is the existence of borderline cases, and the third is susceptibility to sorites reasoning. I’ll show that ‘religiosity’ counts as vague on any of these understandings, and I will then outline the consequences of this fact.

The first criterion claims that a vague term ‘can be understood in several ways without being misunderstood.’\(^73\) We might understand the term ‘bald’ when it is applied to a man who has no hair, several hairs, or some thin patches of hair, without misunderstanding ‘bald’, so on Mehlberg’s definition of ‘vagueness’, according to which vague terms can be understood in various ways without being misunderstood, ‘bald’ is vague. On this very general account ‘religious’ will be vague because we can understand it when applied to different religions, people who count as religious for different reasons and to different degrees. Yet understanding the concept slightly differently in these cases does not involve misunderstanding. We can imagine a situation in which Fred could competently claim ‘Michael is religious’ is true, and Bob could claim that ‘Michael is not religious’ is true, and they could both be entitled to these judgments.

Wright takes it as datum that competent speakers do make judgments on borderline cases, and are entitled to do so.\(^74\) These judgments might typically be subject to qualification, but they are ‘never thereby automatically treated as revealing a mistake, or incompetence’.\(^75\) Fred and Bob make claims that seem to be contradictory, and if they fail to argue about whether their interlocutor’s contradictory statement is also true, it shows a lack of commitment to their own assertion.\(^76\) Fine notes that there are logical connections within the penumbra (the set of borderline cases), so that while one might coherently think that two contradictories are true in different circumstances (for example when the comparison class changes) two contradictories cannot be true at the same time, so Fred and Bob ought to check they have the same comparison class in mind. It might be that Fred says, ‘What do you mean he isn’t religious – he’s a priest!’ and Bob might reply ‘Sure, if that’s what you

\(^75\) Wright, p. 6.
\(^76\) This is unlike the case of assertions of personal taste where there is no appearance of contradiction.
mean, but he never prays and he has lost faith in God, and that’s what I meant’. Otherwise, there is a sense in which Fred and/or Bob are at fault. I conclude that religiosity counts as vague according to the first criterion, since two people may disagree about whether to call someone or something religious in just the kind of way suggested, but without either one of them necessarily being at fault.

The second criterion for vagueness is the existence of borderline cases for that predicate. Although there are competing theories about what a ‘borderline case’ is, there are certain points that almost all theorists agree upon, for instance that there is some uncertainty involved in the application of predicates in borderline cases. However we understand the nature of this uncertainty, we have seen enough examples of uncertainty to agree that the terms ‘religion’ and ‘religious’ have cases where their application is uncertain, so on this definition too religiosity gives rise to borderline cases.

The third criterion for vagueness is susceptibility to sorites paradoxes. The conditional form of this paradox contains a minor premise of the form ‘Fa1’ where this claims that the soritical predicate F applies to a, and ‘1’ is a quantity which gives a clearly non-borderline case of it doing so. For example, ‘a man with 0 hairs on his head is bald’. The major premise rests on the assumption that one small incremental increase (for example a single hair) cannot make a significant (if even noticeable) difference in the application of the vague term. The premise is that if a man with n

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79 Most agree that ‘borderline cases for vague predicate Φ’ are items whose satisfaction of Φ is in some sense unclear or problematic’. (Raffman, Diana, ‘Borderline Cases and Bivalence’, The Philosophical Review, Vol. 114, No. 1, (Jan., 2005), p. 1.) However, this falls short of a comprehensive philosophical account, and there are considerable differences as to what the problems are taken to be and how they are to be resolved. Competing views of borderline cases include those that parse borderline cases in terms of: context-sensitivity; ontic vagueness (i.e. vague objects existing in the world); epistemic uncertainty; the possibility of faultless disagreement. Differing views claim that borderline cases for predicates allow sentences to be either both true and false, giving rise to truth-value gluts, or neither true nor false, giving rise to truth-value gaps.
hairs is bald (where \( n \) is a natural number), then a man with \( n+1 \) hairs will also be bald, and this is generalisable to all vague terms. From repeated application of the conditional premise, the conclusion can be reached that a man with \( n \) number of hairs is bald where \( n \) is arbitrarily large. When this number is large enough that ‘bald’ very clearly does not apply we will have derived a paradoxical conclusion from a seemingly valid argument. The sorites series is generated as follows:

\[
F a_1 \\
\text{If } F a_1 \text{ then } F a_2 \\
\text{If } F a_2 \text{ then } F a_3 \ldots \\
\text{If } F a_{i-1} \text{ then } F a_i \\
\hspace{1cm} \text{-------------------} \\
F a_i \quad \text{(where } i \text{ can be arbitrarily large)}
\]

If this argument is sound, then no one escapes being bald: we are all bald, which is clearly false.\(^{81}\)

If we apply this to the concept of religiosity, we can see that religiosity is going to be susceptible to sorites reasoning. If a man who prays two-thousand times a year is religious, what about man who prays one thousand and ninety-nine times? If a man who attends church three hundred and sixty-five times a year is religious, what about a man who attends three hundred and sixty-four times? If a man believes that God exists with a credence level of 100%, what about the man who believes it with a credence level of 99.99%? This can be generalized to any religious-making feature. Therefore, on all three ways of understanding vagueness, the terms we were interested in defining are vague.

Given that the term ‘religious’ is vague I shall now address the question of how we can successfully use it. Unless one can solve the sorites paradox the term will be unusable for it will mean that everyone is both religious and not-religious.

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\(^{81}\) Not all series of this form are soritical, as they do not all generate paradoxical results. A series only generates paradoxical results if it meets the following conditions: ‘Initially, the series \(<a_1, \ldots, a_l>\) must be ordered; the predicate ‘\(F\)’ must satisfy the following three constraints: (i) it must appear true of \(a_1\), the first item in the series; (ii) it must appear false of \(a_l\), the last item in the series; and (iii) each adjacent pair in the series, \(a_n\) and \(a_{n+1}\), must be sufficiently similar as to appear indiscriminable in respect of ‘\(F\)’—that is, both \(a_n\) and \(a_{n+1}\) appear to satisfy ‘\(F\)’ or neither do.’ (Barnes, J., ‘Medicine, experience and logic’, in J. Barnes, J. Brunschwig, M.F. Burnyeat and M. Schofield (eds.), \textit{Science and Speculation}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (1982), paraphrase quoted from Hyde, ‘Sorites Paradox’.)
(depending which end of the series we begin our reasoning from). The route taken by the most dominant theories in the literature on vagueness for solving the sorites paradox is that soritical argument is unsound. For instance, epistemicists deny the truth of the major premise. They claim that there is some \( n \) for which \( \forall a \rightarrow F_{a+n+1} \) is not true, and despite not knowing the value of \( n \) this represents the cut-off point for the application of the term in question.\(^{82}\) If there were some fixed cut-off point, then for every height, that height would either be classed as ‘tall’ or ‘short’, which does not reflect our classifications in natural language. People we describe as ‘of average/medium height’ exemplify this gap between ‘tall’ and ‘short’, and it seems as though these are not affirmations of our ignorance about whether the person is tall or short, but rather a statement that the person is neither. In the religious case this would require saying that there is some feature that makes something religious, and it is just that we don’t always know (for some reason) what that is, whether it is present, or whether it is present in a large enough degree for the predicate to apply. We could adopt a similar approach to religiosity by using modifiers like ‘devoutly religious’, ‘somewhat religious’, or ‘religious when it suits him’. This theory of vagueness is implausible because there is nothing in our language or the world that justifies any fixed cut-off point. So the assertion that there is an unknowable fixed point seems arbitrary.

Another route to overcoming the sorites paradox is to claim (rather than that the argument is not sound) that the argument is not valid. According to contextualists, the meanings of key vague terms are context-sensitive. A linguistic context is a situation of utterance, and contextual details include but are not restricted to the person making the utterance, the place and time of utterance, the (salient) shared beliefs, assumptions and presuppositions of the conversers, their interests, intentions, and conversational goals and the (salient) earlier linguistic exchanges. It was noted earlier in this chapter that something that changes in religious conversion is that one moves from one paradigm to another, changes one’s understanding of the world, and has a shift in salience patterns and which things will come easily to mind. Therefore the changes just mentioned will count as a change to one’s linguistic context. If the meaning of language is sensitive to changes in context, then undergoing a paradigm shift would result in changes to the very meaning of one’s language. Thus, if religious

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language is context-sensitive the consequence here is that the soritical argument equivocates over the meaning of the vague term, since the key term is indexed to different contexts, and is therefore invalid.

If we want to know whether a word or phrase is context-sensitive, one way is to point to various utterances of a homophonic sentence containing it, and determine whether ‘what is said’ by these tokens is different, and whether this difference could be accounted for by something other than the difference in context. For example:

(1) Most people believe in Jesus.
   Context-1: Uttered in 15AD in Nazareth.
   Context-2: Uttered in 2014AD in Britain.

Contextualists take data like the results of context-shifting arguments, and conclude that there ought to be some way of accounting for it within a semantic theory. As the extension of (1) is different in context-1 and context-2, this is taken to be good evidence that (1) is context-sensitive.

A consequence of the context-sensitivity of religious language is that we need to make certain pieces of contextual information clear in order to be understood. Some of these contextual features will be apparent merely from the fact of our utterance in a certain time and place – when I address peers at a certain time in a certain location, the contextual details of the utterer, time and place of utterance don’t need additional explication. However, things like my background beliefs, assumptions, comparison class, and my interests, intentions, or goals, might need to be explicated. This has wide reaching implications for inter-faith dialogue, and for the way inferences can be drawn when using religious language. Consider the simple fact that many people would endorse the claim that ‘God exists’ despite having very different conceptions of ‘God’. Take this seemingly valid inference:

83 Cappelen and Lepore, Insensitive Semantics: A Defense of Semantic Minimalism and Speech Act Pluralism, Blackwell, (2005), p. 17. This is not easy to determine, for example vague terms like ‘hot’ or ‘tall’ are also terms which some contextualists claim are context-sensitive, but it is not clear which of these phenomena are of primary explanatory importance. Also, if what is said by an expression varies between contexts, it is not clear when this is a result of polysemy rather than context-sensitivity.
(P1) ‘Lottie believes in God.’
(P2) ‘Will believes in God.’
∴ (C3): ‘Lottie and Will both believe in God.’

Assuming that Lottie believes in Krishna, and Will believes in Allah, there is some tension here in thinking of (C3) as true, even when (P1) and (P2) are true. The explanation for this is that an utterance of (P3) conversationally implicates the claim that whatever Lottie and Will believe, it is the same thing. Upholding the Gricean co-operative principle (specifically by not disobeying the maxim of quantity that says ‘make your contribution as informative as is required’\textsuperscript{85}) would require a more explicit statement of the difference, if there were one. So the abbreviation to (3) is only justified if Lottie and Will do believe in the same thing. If not, the speaker is not upholding the co-operative principle. The statement made in (3) is not true, even if that made in (1) and in (2) is true. This can be accounted for by understanding the language involved as context-sensitive, as in this case, the reason that (3) doesn’t follow is that what is claimed in (1) is not the same as what is claimed in (2), due to contextual differences (such as the religious tradition that is a backdrop for these claims).\textsuperscript{86} Thus two people who prima facie hold the same belief, may in fact have little in common. Where this is not made explicit, it can result in conversers simply talking past each other, and can result in it being unclear when parties agree or disagree about substantive points. A contemporary example is that Richard Dawkins

\textsuperscript{85}Grice, H.P., \textit{Studies in the Way of Words}, Harvard University Press, (1991), p. 26. This only applies under normal conversational conditions. Normal conversational conditions are those when there is no reason to suppose the maxims are being deliberately flouted to generate an implicature, or to speak non-literally, or other special cases.

\textsuperscript{86}It can also happen that the context of an utterance can shift mid-sentence. Consider the sentence ‘Mary is religious but she isn’t religious’ (Cf. Lewis, p. 562-3). On the face of it, this seems contradictory. (Cf. Cappelen and Lepore, p. 105, pp. 123-7.) Consider, though, \textit{how} the utterance might be made. As it appears in print it seems more contradictory than if we add the expressive powers of speech. The common method of highlighting exactly the change we have here, is through placing a strong emphasis on the second, stronger, ‘religious’. So although Mary can in a certain context be described as religious, there is another context in which we wouldn’t want to call her religious. That is, she might have some features of religiousness while not exhibiting other features associated with a more rigorous or full understanding of the term. Put this way, it is less obvious that the sentence is just false, and I think it can be true, but it ‘must be judged by the standards appropriate to the circumstances of her speaking them.’ (Travis, ‘Meaning’s role in truth’, \textit{Mind}, Vol. 105, No. 419, (Jul., 1996), p. 466.) Compare this to the way that ‘he is ready but he isn’t’ can seem contradictory in print. This is remedied in ordinary uses of this utterance by (for example) \textit{pointing} at Rhea on the first occurrence of ‘he’ and then at Bob on the second. It might be that the contexts in which ‘Mary is religious’ is true in is just different from the context in which it is false, where different standards or interests are in play.
makes many interesting claims that he regards as undermining ‘religion’, but what he means by ‘religion’ (and therefore what he targets) is not what everyone means. It is therefore arguable that many aspects of ‘religion’ construed differently are untouched by his claims. If both sides defined their terms relative to a context, or could find a way to occupy the same context, there would be less disagreement.

This bears strongly on understanding religious conversion for the following reason. If someone undergoes a conversion, their linguistic context will change. The subject enters a whole new context of discourse. This will often result in a situation where the very meaning of their language will change – we might think of this as a change in language-game, potentially one that is not fully accessible from within other language-games. It is going to be difficult for non-religious people to appreciate what is distinctive about religiosity without an ‘insider perspective’ and explaining the phenomenon in purely humanistic and scientific terms is almost inevitably going to miss what, for the religious person, is indispensible. On the other hand, the religious adherent might also find it difficult to appreciate the non-religious contributors to religiosity in all their diverse forms (the assumption is that at least some aspects of religiosity can be explained without reference to the subject of religious worship, but solely humanistically or scientifically). As one cannot help but occupy a perspective, it will be very difficult to overcome this challenge. The old worldview and the new may be incommensurable. Another consequence of this is that:

In religion every level of devoutness must have its own appropriate form of expression which has no sense at a lower level. This doctrine, which means something at a higher level, is null and void for someone who is still at the lower level; he can only understand it wrongly and so these words are not valid for such a person.

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88 There are ‘three types of incommensurability in Kuhn's remarks: (1) methodological—there is no common measure because the methods of comparison and evaluation change; (2) perceptual/observational—observational evidence cannot provide a common basis for theory comparison, since perceptual experience is theory-dependent; (3) semantic—the fact that the languages of theories from different periods of normal science may not be inter-translatable presents an obstacle to the comparison of those theories.’ Bird, ‘Kuhn’.
This is analogous to not being able to see Lincoln in Dali’s painting until you are far enough away.

So far I have shown that the reason that the concept of religiosity cannot be defined can be explained in terms of its vagueness and context-sensitivity, and that religious conversion will involve linguistic shifts because context-shifts affect meaning. We can use the concept despite this because we can explicate the relevant contextual details. This doesn’t, admittedly, take us all the way. Sometimes in a borderline case we may not know whether to apply the term even once accessible contextual details have been spelt out. However, sometimes the subject matter does not allow for the degree of precision that an ‘ideal language’ theorist might seek from their application of concepts, and the assumption that this is a problem can be challenged. In reply to similar concerns, Wittgenstein asks the pertinent question:

Is it even always an advantage to replace an indistinct picture by a sharp one? Isn’t the indistinct one often exactly what we need?

Frege compares a concept to an area and says that an area with vague boundaries cannot be called an area at all. This presumably means that we cannot do anything with it.—But is it senseless to say: “Stand roughly there”? Suppose that I were standing with someone in a city square and said that. As I say it I do not draw any kind of boundary, but perhaps point with my hand [...]90

How would one convey what they saw looking at the night sky if ‘lots of stars’ were not enough, and one had to specify the precise number of stars? How could one exactly state what they meant by claiming their child was intelligent without using any vague terms? It is unclear what such a specification would even consist in, as this example of multidimensional vagueness requires the fixing of more than one aspect of ‘intelligence’. Religiosity is equally hard to precisify. Indeed, ‘Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions, any more than in all the products of the crafts.’91 Due to the pervasiveness of vagueness, even if it were possible to eradicate

90 Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §71.
it, doing so would require a large-scale upheaval of our ordinary language. There has been insufficient motivation to undertake this.

The view I have argued for here is sometimes implicitly adopted, though often with little detail provided to support it.\(^{92}\) We can, for example, see a considerable similarity between the account of family resemblance and vagueness provided above and the following passage in Alston’s ‘Religion’:

These are the cases to which the term “religious” applies most certainly and unmistakably. However there can be a variety of cases that differ from the paradigm in different ways and to different degrees […] As more of the religion-making characteristics drop out, either partially or completely, we feel less secure about applying the term “religion,” and there will be less unanimity in the language community with respect to the application of the term. However, there do not seem to be points along these various dimensions of deviation that serve as sharp a demarcation of religion from nonreligion. It is simply that we encounter less and less obvious cases of religion […] Thus the best way to explain the concept of religion is to elaborate in detail the relevant features of an ideally clear case of religion and then indicate the respects in which less clear cases differ from this, without hoping to find any sharp line dividing religion from nonreligion. (Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s notion of “family resembles” among the things to which a term applies.)\(^{93}\)

What appears to be missing from the train of thought just quoted is an account of the vagueness of the terms involved, and of how exactly this vagueness is to be understood; and it is this task that has been attempted in our discussion so far. What is now required is some thought about the \textit{kinds} of features involved in religiosity that, when present, give us reason to more readily apply the term, when not present, give us reason to withhold it, and when present to some degree, give us reason to think of it as a borderline case. Thus in the next section I explore some suggestions made in the literature and offer my own proposal of some dimensions of religiosity, which will be the focus of subsequent chapters.

\(^{92}\) For example in Harrison, ‘The Pragmatics of Defining Religion in a Multi-Cultural World’.
\(^{93}\) Alston, ‘Religion’, p. 142. Here my point of divergence is that I see no need to start with an ‘ideally clear case’ as there could easily be seen to be more than one perfectly clear case that nevertheless have little in common. By starting with an ‘ideal’ we might end up concluding that something is not a religion based on its not sharing enough common features with this ‘ideal’ despite it having many other religious-making features.
1.3. The dimensions of religiosity.

According to Richie, ‘Religion is the intimate and vital apprehension, by the individual, of what is conceived to be reality, in its fullest sense, la vraie vérité of things […] regarded as in some way related to the individual himself; any such apprehension must embrace belief, emotional response, and the determination of conduct, in so far as conduct is supposed to have a bearing on the connection of the individual with such reality.’\(^{94}\) This involves three dimensions – an apprehension of reality, an emotional response to this belief, and conduct which accords with it. This maps on to the belief, affect, and function accounts sketched in the discussion of typologies in section 1.2.1.

This also maps on to another, more detailed taxonomy provided by Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham and Pitcher. According to Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham and Pitcher there are three components to religiosity and two modes of each, meaning that there are six dimensions to religiosity.\(^{95}\) The components correspond to the distinction between knowing (cognition), feeling (affect), and doing (behaviour). The cognitive component is the religious belief, creed, ideology, or orthodoxy component. The affective component is the ‘feelings toward religious beings, objects, or institutions’\(^{96}\) and includes feelings of commitment too. The behavioural component includes the actual practices and behaviours, for example attending church, praying, tithing, and behaving ethically. The two modes that these components can be in are the personal and the institutional. The personal mode ‘is comprised of religious beliefs, feelings, and behaviors that find their source in personal and individual religion. This includes the acceptance of doctrinal orthodoxy … feelings and commitment toward God, and religious behavior’.\(^{97}\) The institutional mode has the same components but directed towards formalised and institutionalised religion, which ‘includes acceptance of religious beliefs which are unique to a sect or denomination, personal feelings and attachments to a particular church or


\(^{96}\) Ibid.

\(^{97}\) Ibid, p. 228.
congregations, and participation in religious ritual and worship services.’ 98 The dimensions are:

(1) Traditional orthodoxy: Belief in traditional doctrines.
(2) Particularist orthodoxy: ‘Acceptance or rejections of beliefs peculiar to a particular religious organization.’ 99
(3) Spiritual commitment: This encompasses the relationship between the religious person and the transcendental, as they put it ‘It is the affective orientation of the individual towards deity and is a personal, subjective mode of religion.’ 100
(4) Church commitment: ‘Church commitment encompasses the attachment, identification, and loyalty of the individual toward the church organization or the religious community.’ 101
(5) Religious behavior: ‘Defined as those behaviors which are by nature religious, but do not require membership or participation in a religious group or community. For example, personal prayer, scripture study, giving to the poor, and encouraging others to believe in Christ’ 102
(6) Religious participation: ‘Religious participation has generally been operationalized as frequency of church attendance or attendance at worship services, although it has also been operationalized as participation in church organizations and amount of financial support given to the church… [but] might include any number of behaviors’ 103

These dimensions were tested for by asking questions designed to detect their presence in a large sample group of active and inactive church members from the Mormon faith. The final sample was 1874 people strong, having had an average response rate of 64%. Using various data analysis techniques, the data they collected appeared to confirm that all the dimensions of religiosity listed above were in fact exhibited in this religious community. There are of course many open questions. Given that this data was all collected from the same religious community, it is

98 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid, p. 231.
possible that different dimensions would emerge if members of a distinct community were questioned. Nevertheless, the above schema seems to provide a useful framework for our investigation. In the remainder of this thesis I will examine the various dimensions involved and the conceptual connections between them.

Specifically, I will examine what I shall call the doxastic dimension, the affective dimension, and the dimension of praxis. It will become clear how my view has advantages over the alternative of providing a rigid definition. For instance, Stone distinguishes between religion and what he considers to be three non-religious but related phenomena, namely, spiritual paths, philosophies of life, and cults. Spiritual paths include engagement in practices such as ‘a programme of austerity, breath control, mental exercises, and physical postures’ and while such activities may be instrumental in attaining liberation, Stone does not think they are sufficient for religiosity.\(^{104}\) A philosophy of life ‘tells us what matters in human life and how to get it… [it] is essentially practical’.\(^{105}\) He says that ‘A philosophy of life is a non-religious theory of the good conjoined with practical instructions for attaining the good.’ A cult is defined as ‘ritual practices intended to please a supernatural or quasi-supernatural being (or collection of such beings)’.\(^{106}\)

It seems as if, on Stone’s view, we need to discount the ‘non-religious’ elements he distinguishes from genuine ‘religion’ and so may miss the ways that these elements can actually be dimensions of religiosity. On my view we can see a spiritual path as instantiating the dimension of praxis. We can equate the philosophy of life with the doxastic dimension. My discussion of ritual practices in Chapter Four will show that rituals partake in all three dimensions. The sense in which these things are not ‘religion’, is the sense in which they are insufficient on their own to constitute a religion since they only partake in a limited number of dimensions. The extent to which they are religious, is the extent to which they do partake in these dimensions. The fact that there can be these different emphases in different cases, and that one dimension can predominate, is not problematic on my view. Instead, it is a feature anticipated by the vagueness and context-sensitivity of the language used to describe the phenomenon of religious conversion, and as we saw in §1.2.3, we can alleviate the

\(^{104}\) Stone, p. 340.
\(^{105}\) Ibid, p. 341.
\(^{106}\) Ibid, p. 342.
potential concerns that may arise here by spelling out features of the context that are relevant.

1.4. Concluding remarks.

This chapter has explored several ways of thinking about conversion. I explored an analogy with a scientific revolution, and the analogous role of paradigm shifts and gestalt switches in the process. I also sketched a view on which a logical definition of religious conversion will not be forthcoming, because there is no single set of necessary and sufficient features that all instances of ‘religion’ have in common. Rather, these terms are both vague and context-sensitive. This is compatible with the view that the terms in question work like family resemblance concepts, with certain features that count towards something’s religiosity without these features needing to be exhibited by every case, and with some counting for more than others, and so on. This raised the pertinent question: which are the ‘family resemblances’ which cases of religious conversion tend to have in common? What are the things that combine in various ways on different occasions to make something appropriately classed as a religious conversion? Having some idea of what are ‘religious-making features’ can build a picture that can be applied with some degree of common sense to each instance we wonder about, without the need for these features to form part of a logical definition.
CHAPTER 2

THE DOXASTIC DIMENSION

Ordinary people have the power of not thinking of that about which they do not wish to think. “Do not meditate on the passages about the Messiah”, said the Jew to his son. Thus our people often act. Thus are false religions preserved, and even the true one, in regard to many persons.¹

The preceding chapter argued that religious conversion involves three dimensions, and the current chapter will focus on the doxastic dimension – that is, the role that religious beliefs play in religious conversion. I shall adopt the following terminology. The set of all beliefs a person holds will be called their ‘belief-set’, a belief that is in some relevant way ‘religious’ will be called a ‘religious belief’, and the set of a person’s religious beliefs will be called their ‘religious belief-set’.² Negative beliefs concerning religion (including those that are the contrary or contradictory of any belief in the religious belief-set) I shall label ‘irreligious’, while beliefs not concerning religion at all I shall call ‘non-religious’.

The precise content of the religious belief-set of converts will not be predictable as it will be different on a case-by-case basis. Exactly which beliefs are adopted will differ even among those who convert to the same religion at the same time and in roughly the same way (for example if two people were to witness the same miracle). According to William James, the specific content of the doctrines that are adopted is not that important. James says that:

The particular form which [beliefs] affect is the result of suggestion and imitation. If they went through their growth-crisis in other faiths and other countries, although the essence of the change would be the same (since it is one in the main so inevitable), its accidents would be different.³

² It is not entirely straightforward to determine exactly what should count as a religious belief. It might be that what distinguishes a religious belief from a non-religious belief is the manner in which it is held or the way in which it is formed, as well as the content itself. Some of this uncertainty can be resolved by the usual methods of dealing with vagueness and context-sensitivity as discussed in §1.2.2, but I shall focus on clear-cut cases here. For any that do not appear clear-cut, as long as it could be replaced by one that is more clear-cut, this shouldn’t interfere with the spirit of the points I make in this chapter.
³ James, pp. 198-9.
Thus the content of the religious beliefs that someone forms during a conversion may depend more on the setting, expectations, prior beliefs, and external interpretations of the subject. There will of course be some beliefs that are required by religious institutions for a conversion to count as a conversion to their specific institution. For example, one might claim that unless one believes certain things about Jesus Christ then one doesn’t count as a Christian – these creedal components are what distinguish Christianity from, say, Judaism.\(^4\) To avoid an unduly narrow focus, I will focus on the role of belief in general, rather than the role of any specific belief.

The believer may object that the religion they have converted to is somehow ‘meant to be’, or is ‘proper’, or even that one would not be happy in any other religions and this is the only religion for them. An analogy: at a certain point in a happy marriage you may believe that your spouse is the only person in the world for you; you cannot imagine being so intimate or happy with another, you have a great deal of care for and loyalty to that person, and a great number of affirmative beliefs about both the relationship and the person. However, often, if even a small contingency were otherwise, (you missed the bus you met on, you sat at a different table that day in the restaurant, your first date went terribly for some unfortunate reason) you may have ended up feeling the very same thing about another person altogether, or no-one at all.\(^5\) Thus I maintain that there is no need to prematurely narrow the focus.

I will argue that a religious conversion may involve a change in the religious belief-set of a subject (for example acquiring the belief that ‘God exists’), or a change in the way that certain religious beliefs relate to other beliefs (for instance coming to see the belief that miracles are possible as relevant to the belief that a person was healed of an incurable disease) or in the way that religious beliefs relate to other cognitive states. I will discuss several ways in which beliefs are formed, focussing on three: beliefs that are formed after consideration of deductive or probabilistic

\(^4\) However, as there are other distinguishing features, this might not be necessary. There are, for example, certain significant practices, rituals, and symbols that may set apart a particular religion (for example confession, communion, and the cross).

\(^5\) Note that the emphasis on the notion of one true love, or indeed, the unique individuality of each person, is a relatively modern western one, not shared by many other cultures and times. In these the idea that one could be as happily married to any number or people is far more convincing. The same may be true of religions, where the emphasis on the differences and the exclusivity of religious faiths may be cultural too.
arguments; beliefs that are formed as a result of the testimony of others; and beliefs that are formed as the result of religious experience. I will then assess the justification that beliefs formed in these ways would be capable of having, and will conclude that such justification is likely to be problematic in many cases.

Later chapters will explore the ways in which the doxastic dimension of religiosity interacts with other dimensions. It will become apparent that a change in belief state is not on its own sufficient for a conversion; or to put the matter more precisely, a change in belief state which does not generate changes in the other dimensions, and which is not in turn responsive to those changes, will not in fact count as a genuine change in belief state. The upshot is that religious conversion will involve changes not just in beliefs but in several dimensions of religiosity.

2.1. The nature of religious belief.

There are several distinct conventional uses of ‘believe’ and ‘belief’. One typical distinction is that between ‘belief-in’ and ‘belief-that’. Belief-that P can sometimes be taken as an assertion of a particular positive attitude towards the proposition that P, as in ‘I believe that God exists’, but in many contexts might also imply that one doesn’t know that P, as in ‘I believe that John is in France’. Belief-in is often claimed to involve belief-that. For example, ‘I believe in equality’ might involve the belief that equality is a good thing, and ‘I believe in my daughter’ might involve the belief that my daughter is a capable or good person in some respect. Throughout I shall mean to

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6 Cf., ‘faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead’, Bible, James 2: 17.

7 There are various theories about beliefs (which can be understood as applied instances of theories about mental states in general). One such theory is that beliefs are representational; they are ‘structures in the mind that represent the propositions they affirm—usually in something like a mental language’ (Chignell, Andrew, ‘The Ethics of Belief’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, (Fall 2010 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2010/entries/ethics-belief/>). Another idea is that beliefs are merely dispositions to act in a certain way. On this behaviourist approach, to say that you have the belief that there is a table in your path is to say, for example, that you are disposed to act in such a way as to avoid the table as you walk, and to affirm that there is a table if asked, and other such behaviours. Eliminativists claim that the notion of belief does not refer to any real entity or state, but is merely a convenient way of expressing certain aspects of folk-psychology. Some epistemologists assume that belief is a primitive concept. Adjudication between these options will not be necessary to say what is interesting about belief as it pertains to religious conversion.

8 But not always: ‘it is tempting to suppose that “belief in X” presupposes a belief that X exists. […] I can believe in God (trust in his providence) while accepting that He exists, rather than firmly believing this.’ Alston, ‘Belief Acceptance and Religious Faith’, p. 14.

9 Complications of interpretation may well occur, in particular when reading biblical and other ancient texts, and this is especially true in light of the etymology of the word ‘believe’. As Alston remarks “believe” originally meant “to hold dear” or “to love,” as its German relative belieben still does. […]
use ‘belief’ in the propositional sense. Rather than give a complete philosophical account of beliefs-that, which would be unmanageable in the current context, I will instead take the following five features of belief as a starting point. I take it that these aspects of belief are appropriate and plausible in many ordinary cases, which will be sufficient to explore how beliefs operate in religious conversion. I don’t assume anything about how these aspects of belief are to be explained theoretically, nor that they hold in all cases.

The first is that beliefs track evidence. That is, beliefs typically ‘aim at truth’. Williams claims that factual beliefs can be based on evidence, in the strong sense that if someone stopped believing the evidence, they would stop believing the proposition based on it. If this is right, then religious beliefs would also form in response to ‘evidence’, which in the analogous religious case might be a religious experience. Of course, sometimes beliefs fail to track evidence (as in cases of cognitive limitations like absent-mindedness and irrationality, or self-deception, which will be further explored below).

The second is that propositions can be assented to with various levels of credence. Credence levels can be expressed as a decimal on the scale between 0 and 1, where 0 is no credence in the claim at all, and 1 is complete certainty. There is a naïve conception of belief on which belief states are binary – one either has a belief or one does not. Yet, this overlooks the fact that some beliefs are held tentatively and others are held with conviction. This model allows one to say that some propositions are believed with a low level of credence, others with a high level of credence, and some propositions inspire such a low credence level that they are not believed at all. In the current context, it might be that some beliefs held prior to a conversion will come to be held with a higher degree of credence after a conversion, and other propositions may be assented to with a higher level of credence such that they come to count as beliefs. It might not be the case that there are clear cut-off points on this scale at which we would claim that the subject definitely believes, definitely does not believe.

In Shakespeare's All's Well That Ends Well, when the king says to Bertram, “Believe not thy disdain,” this is not to be understood as exhorting the hearer not to believe (in our sense) that he has disdain, but rather not to cherish, foster, or hold dear the disdain that he obviously has. When the King James translation of the Bible or the early Anglican prayer books use “believe,” we cannot suppose without more ado that the word is being used in its familiar contemporary propositional sense.’ (Alston, ‘Belief Acceptance and Religious Faith’, p. 23-4.)


11 I consider the relationship between religious experience and belief formation in §2.4.2.
believe, or somewhat believes the relevant proposition, and there is no consensus on
this in the literature.

Several proposals have been offered which parallel the options offered in the
discussion of vagueness concerning where on a scale something needs to lie for the
object to count as a borderline case for a predicate, or as an instance of that predicate
applying and not applying. One proposal is that an agent should believe a proposition
‘if and only if her degree of belief that the proposition is true is higher than her degree
of belief that the proposition is false’. This seems prima facie counter to our own
experiences of holding beliefs: it seems more plausible when there is only a marginal
difference between degrees of belief for a proposition and for its contradictory to say
that we simply don’t believe either way. In the religious case, I propose that in a case
like this we would be more likely to claim that the subject is agnostic. Another
proposal is that ‘an agent should believe a proposition if and only if her degree of
belief for that proposition is higher than a certain threshold.’ This gives rise to
higher-order vagueness, but can be alleviated once again by specifying certain
relevant contextual factors. For example, in a context where a religious official is
considering whether to formally accept someone into their faith the standard might be
higher than if someone is having a casual conversation about that same person. It
might be that there are certain beliefs for which we would always demand a higher
credence level in order to count them, and religious beliefs may be one such case.

The third feature of belief is that beliefs can be attributed to subjects even
when they are not currently entertaining, thinking of, or paying attention to that belief,
for instance when that subject is asleep. According to Alston, having a belief ‘is not to
be in a certain episodic conscious state or to perform any action or undergo any
process’. However, beliefs are sometimes actively thought about, and this allows us
to draw a distinction between latent and active beliefs. Latent beliefs (sometimes

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12 Huber, Franz, ‘Formal Representations of Belief’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,
13 Ibid.
Let me ask: When do you know that application? Always? day and night? or only when you are
actually thinking of the rule? do you know it, that is, in the same way as you know the alphabet and the
multiplication table? Or is what you call “knowledge” a state of consciousness or a process—say a
thought of something, or the like?’ (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §148.) and ‘Suppose it
were asked: “When do you know how to play chess? All the time? or just while you are making a
move? And the whole of chess during each move?”—How queer that knowing how to play chess
should take such a short time, and a game so much longer!’ (Ibid, §150.)
called tacit beliefs) are those that we would claim that a subject has even though the subject may not be thinking of it, and perhaps may not have thought of it. Latent beliefs can perhaps usefully be thought of as dispositional attitudes. Having a dispositional attitude towards a proposition need not involve exercising the attitude, or even being aware of it. For example, I might have had the dispositional affirmative attitude towards the proposition that ‘894+6=900’ without ever having had occasion to do this sum, because I would be disposed to affirm it if I were to think of it. I would exercise my belief if a situation arose where I had occasion to think it and affirm it.

An implication of the possibility of latent beliefs is that a person might not be aware of the content of their entire belief set, therefore a subject might acquire religious beliefs without acquiring the higher-order belief that they have religious beliefs. This is the fourth aspect of beliefs; subjects may not have transparent self-knowledge regarding their belief-set. In fact, often one may actively deny that they have a certain belief, and yet on reflection, retrospectively acknowledge that they did in fact have the belief they denied having at the time. This is more common than one might think – for instance, we may often feel or act in ways that we don’t understand, and only later come to realise that we harboured a belief that explains that action or feeling. If this is right then it would be possible for someone to believe that God exists, without the second order belief that they believe that God exists. Thus it might be possible for someone to form religious beliefs without realising it, and therefore this aspect of any resultant or concurrent conversion would likewise be without their knowledge. The significance of this is that one may not be fully aware of one’s conversion at an early stage in the process, and it may come as a surprise. However, once one gains a certain perspective on the process, they may

15 There is a question about whether latent beliefs should count as genuine beliefs. The question is, do we say that I believe that 894+6=900 only after I have thought it, or would you attribute this belief to me at any time you feel sure that I would affirm it if I did think it? Wittgenstein discusses this issue using the example of a teacher ordering a student to continue a series where they add two to the preceding number each time. The teacher can say that they knew (and so believed) when they gave the order, that when the student got to 1000 they should write 1002 afterwards, but 'you don't want to say that you thought of the step from 1000 to 1002 at that time—and even if you did think of this step, still you did not think of other ones. When you said "I already knew at the time....." that meant something like: "If I had then been asked what number should be written after 1000, I should have replied '1002'."' (Ibid, §187). This reminds us that "to mean it" did not mean: to think of it.' (Ibid, §692.) And likewise, 'to believe it' does not mean 'to think it'. If belief does not mean thinking, then these two things can come apart – people can certainly think things that they don’t believe, and, as our intuition about the mathematics teacher makes compelling, we can also believe things that we don’t think about.

16 This is further support for the claim that self-ascription cannot be a criterion for religious conversion where religious conversion involves the acquisition of religious beliefs.
retrospectively reframe the significance of earlier parts of the process. One religious
tradition that speaks to this is that of giving testimony. This is a procedure where new
converts (as well as others) publicly talk about their life prior to conversion and their
conversion, weaving the narrative in a way that makes sense of their new-found
religion, and is often delivered in terms that they would not have accepted prior to the
conversion.\footnote{This will be revisited in §5.2.}

An implication of the possibility of not having second-order religious beliefs
is that we cannot rely on first-person authority to ascertain what someone believes. It
wouldn’t be sufficient to conclude that ‘X doesn’t believe that P’ or ‘X believes that
P’ merely because X sincerely says so. Not being able to rely on sincere first-person
testimony means we need another way of knowing whether or not someone has a
belief in order to avoid the epistemological problem of not being able to attribute
beliefs to people, and, insofar as religious conversions involve beliefs, not being able
to attribute religious conversions to people.

One way to do this might be to appeal to the fifth aspect of beliefs, namely,
that beliefs can be action-guiding. If someone believes that P, P should in some way
affect his or her behaviour when that behaviour is relevant to the truth or falsity of P.
If we want to explain why someone takes an indirect route across a room, we can
appeal to their belief that there is a table in the way and that they cannot walk through
the table. We think of beliefs as \textit{motivating} and \textit{explaining} behaviour. Amesbury
claims that ‘nothing is worthy of being called a belief “which has not some influence
The belief and the behaviour come apart, in that the behaviour can occur as the result
of another belief, or some irrational or non-rational motivation instead, and the
presence of a particular belief could result in different behaviour depending on a
variety of non-doXastic factors. However, for P to motivate x is not for P to entail or
be entailed by x, it is merely for it to count as a factor that affects x, even if it is
outweighed by other motivations. Belief is \textit{relevant} to an explanation of behaviour.

So to resolve the problem that there might be with belief attribution because of
issues with self-knowledge, we might attribute beliefs based on the behaviour patterns
that would be made sense of by attributing that belief, but would be strange or inexplicable without that belief. In the religious case, we can attribute religious beliefs based on religious behavior, like praying to God, praising God at church, talking to your friends about your relationship with God. These and similar activities would be strange without an accompanying belief that God exists, and attributing this belief would make sense of that behaviour. If we think of speech and thought as types of behaviour, this also has the advantage of not making self-affirmation irrelevant. While sincere first-person testimony wouldn’t be sufficient, it would still count in favour of it, and while not overrideable in cases of a lack of self-knowledge, it would still be part of the calculus one might make in deciding whether to attribute that person with a belief or not.

This section has aimed to render the following claims plausible:

(1) Beliefs aim to track evidence but do not always do so successfully.
(2) There can be degrees of beliefs.
(3) Subjects don’t need to think of or currently be entertaining beliefs in order to be said to have them.
(4) Subjects can have the belief that P without having the second-order belief that they believe that P.
(5) Beliefs motivate behaviour.

These conclusions have implications for the role of belief in religious conversion, and allow us to make various claims about religious conversion given these features of belief. (1) has implications for the formation of religious belief (which will be discussed in the next section). (2) means that religious beliefs can be held with varying degrees of credence. Once a religious belief has formed, it could continue to respond to external and internal factors and could be held with more or less credence at different points in that subject’s life. For instance, a belief may form and be sufficient for counting as a genuine religious belief, and for instigating interactions with other dimensions of religious conversion (to be discussed in subsequent chapters) but this could be held with greater degrees of credence at later points, which

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19 Alston offers a partial and yet more complete list of things that we would expect to find when X believes that P, which can also help to identify and attribute beliefs. Alston, ‘Belief Acceptance and Religious Faith’, p. 4.
may then count as a deepening within the believer’s faith. The beliefs could also come
to be held with less credence, which could mean a de-emphasising of the role of belief
in that person’s religious life compared with other aspects of their religious life, and if
the credence level falls below a certain point it could also instigate or form part of a
deconversion. An implication of (3) is that we can attribute religious beliefs to people
who are not currently thinking of the content of that belief, and so once such a belief
is acquired, the person can be said to have it on an on-going basis, despite the fact that
it is not always active. An implication of (4) is that someone can have a belief without
actually being aware that they have it. This in turn means that we cannot rely on self-
attrition to determine whether or not someone has a particular belief (although that
still counts in favour of it). Something that can help with belief attribution is the
behaviour that the subject exhibits that is relevant to the possession of that belief, and
this fact is (5). The implication of (5) most relevant to religious conversion is that in
order to understand the doxastic dimension we will also need to consider the
dimension that includes religious behaviour, which I call the dimension of praxis.

2.3. The formation of religious beliefs.

Beliefs tend to respond to stimulus, rather than to spontaneously appear with no
stimulus at all. This section will raise some suggestions about what stimulus might
lead to the formation of religious beliefs, so that we might better be in a position to
understand how religious conversion, insofar as forming religious beliefs is part of
this phenomenon, comes about. We are exposed to various kinds of stimulus through
engagement with the world. We can engage with the world in many ways that will
count as stimulus relevant to religious belief formation (although these ways could
count in favour of or against religious beliefs), for instance: studying theological
arguments and employing reasoning to reach a conclusion that becomes an object of
belief; being influenced by the testimony of others who hold religious beliefs, and
coming to share those beliefs as the result of that testimony; by awareness of the
world via perceptual and introspective faculties leading to a belief about the data
received by those faculties, for example by witnessing miracles or having religious
experiences and coming to believe the content of those experiences. I will discuss
these in turn.
I take the following to be a reasonable assumption: if one self-awaresely believes all of the premises of a valid argument that one takes to be valid (that is, if one thinks it is sound), is paying suitable attention, and has functioning cognitive powers, one will thereby come to believe the conclusion of that argument. If I believe that Socrates is a man, and that all men are mortal, I would be irrational or negligent if I didn’t also believe the conclusion that Socrates is mortal. So, if one comes across a valid argument whose conclusion is of a religious nature, and one believes all of the premises of that argument, the expectation in ordinary circumstances would be that if I didn’t already believe the conclusion I would thereby come to believe it. This may be one way in which religious beliefs are formed.

There are certainly valid arguments with religious conclusions. However, not everyone who comes into contact with these valid arguments will believe the conclusion as a result. There are several reasons why this might be the case, any one of which could be a sufficient explanation, but more than one may apply to a given case. One explanation for this failure might be that the subject does not appreciate the validity of the argument. Even though an argument might be valid, sometimes people make mistakes and so are not convinced due to this failure of cognitive processing. In an experiment where students were asked: Is the following argument valid?

(P1) If it is raining, Fred gets wet.
(P2) It is not raining.

∴ (C1) Fred does not get wet.

Over 30% of students erroneously claimed that the argument is valid. This sample represents a relatively well-educated section of the population, so the study may underrepresent the number of errors one might expect from a more representative sample of the overall population. Given that such a high percentage of students make errors and given that religious arguments are almost always more complexly structured than this relatively simple denial of the antecedent, it is a reasonable claim that some people may be convinced by invalid arguments, and conversely will not be

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20 It is uncontroversial that there can be valid arguments concluding that God exists, or similar, as these can be constructed based on valid forms from premises like ‘If all bachelors are unmarried then God exists.’

convinced by valid arguments, owing to mistaken assessments of the validity or invalidity of the arguments in question.

If one thinks that an argument is valid, one might nevertheless fail to believe the conclusion if one disbelieves one or more premises, that is, thinks that the argument is unsound. Because belief formation depends on whether a subject believes the premises, not whether they are actually true, not everyone will form the same beliefs in response to the same arguments. Some people will not believe the conclusions of even sound arguments. This need not imply that one party is being irrational, although certainly some failures to believe will count as irrational. For one thing, one may simply be ignorant of the subject matter of one or more premises and so not hold a belief either way. In practice, someone might even think that there is sufficient reason to believe based on the evidence and yet fail to believe it anyway.22

Many arguments for God’s existence argue from premises that will not be accepted by anyone who does not already have a prior religious commitment. Such arguments are therefore useful only as a solidifying bolster for those who already believe the conclusion and so will be dialectically ineffective. We could claim that the subject in these cases is negligent, and wilfully turns his natural lights away from the propositions which would lead him to believe: ‘Men prefer the darkness to the light, as the Gospel says, but they can do so not because the light is not irresistible, but because they wilfully turn away from it.’ 23 In such cases, the prerequisite for believing the conclusion of such arguments would be relevant engagement with the premises. It might be that there are further arguments that could be made for the truth of such premises, and the subject could seek out such arguments, and engage in the intellectual search for truth in order to form a belief one way or the other with regard to such premises.24

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22 One might imagine a sincere utterance of the following kind, offered here by Speak’s imagined interlocutor: ‘I think there is enough evidence to believe – I mean, if I encountered someone in precisely my same evidential circumstances with respect to the truth of the salvation-relevant propositions, I would think her perfectly reasonable in believing. It’s just that I don’t find myself believing the propositions – and I can’t simply make myself believe them by force of will.’ Speak, Daniel James, ‘Salvation Without Belief’, Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion, Vol. 43, Iss. 2, (Jun., 2007), p. 232. This may benefit from application of research into the phenomenon of epistemic disagreement, to determine whether two parties can both be rational despite not forming the same beliefs based on the same body of evidence.


24 Contrary to the attitude described in this chapter’s epithet.
I started with the default assumption that in the face of a valid argument that is judged to be sound, subjects who are functioning well will come to believe the conclusion. I have explained some failures of this by claiming that the validity may not be accurately judged, and that the premises may not all be believed to be true (irrespective of whether they are in fact true or not). However, there may also be cases where the subject does believe that the argument is valid, and does believe the premises, and yet still does not believe the conclusion. It might be that in some cases deductive arguments are not sufficient for religious belief formation even when judged to be sound, or at least they will not be sufficient for the formation of a belief that will be strong enough (held with a high enough level of credence) to motivate the huge range of behavioural, doxastic, and affective changes one would expect in a religious conversion. This could be because they are ‘cold’, and the passions are not suitably excited. Pascal says in his Pensées, ‘“God is, or He is not.” But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here.’25 Additionally, Augustine remarks that once certainty in religious truth was gained: ‘Well, it is certain now, yet the burden still weighs you down, while other people are given wings on freer shoulders, people who have not worn themselves out with research, nor spent a decade and more reflecting on these questions.’26 If we accept the implication of such remarks, namely that there are cases where reason is not appropriate or sufficient, we will need to look at other methods of belief formation to understand this aspect of religious conversion.

Another way in which religious beliefs can be formed is in response to the testimony of religious people. In the same way that we form beliefs about academic subjects by listening to teachers and professors, about world events by listening to newsreaders, one might come to have religious beliefs by listening to religious people or authorities. This is a common way that young people come to have religious beliefs when they grow up in religious families or communities. In the case at hand, we are considering those who form religious beliefs once their most formative years have already passed, and so also, once their ability to discriminate between good and bad testimony has been developed and their susceptibility to the influence of others has (often) diminished. When adults form religious beliefs in this way, one might expect it to be more likely under conditions where their community or central relationships change – that is, conversions are more likely to occur when exposed to a new religion.

25 Pascal, Pensées, 233.
26 Augustine, Confessions, p. 199.
or a familiar religion in a new way, which may be because they move to live in a new culture, enter a marriage, or form a relationship with a charismatic individual. New interactions with religious individuals can have the effect of challenging preconceptions that blocked the formation of religious belief (for example that religious people are boring, or that religious people are irrational), can expose them to new information (for example they might be told new facts about the religion they had previously been unaware of) or can inspire them to find that information for themselves (for example to gain acceptance by a new person or group of people whose acceptance they desire).

A key way in which ordinary beliefs are formed is through experience of the world and of ourselves – that is, via our internal and external senses. In the reports of religious conversion considered by William James, an occurrence he finds particularly interesting is of what he calls ‘automatisms’, which include hearing voices, seeing lights, seeing visions, convulsions, physical incapacities, spontaneous verbal behaviour or spontaneous motor behaviour.\(^27\) One particularly common experience is of hallucinatory lumination (seeing lights, called a ‘photism’ in James’s psychological terminology), which can be exemplified by Saint Paul’s vision on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3) and Constantine’s vision of a cross in the sky.\(^28\) I will refer to all such experiences, when they feature as part of an explanation of a religious conversion or when they have some religious content, as religious experiences. An example is the following, taken from a first-person report of religious conversion:

All at once the glory of God shone upon and round about me in a manner almost marvelous…. A light perfectly ineffable shone in my soul, that almost prostrated me on the ground…. This light seemed like the brightness of the sun in every direction. It was too intense for the eyes…. I think I knew something then, by actual experience, of that light that prostrated Paul on the way to Damascus. It was surely a light such as I could not have endured long.\(^29\)

The frequency of genuine experiences of this kind can easily be overestimated because sometimes when such reports are made the report should be taken

\(^{27}\) ‘[H]allucinations, pains, convulsions, paralyses of feeling and of motion, and the whole procession of symptoms of hysterical disease of body and of mind.’ James, p. 231.
\(^{28}\) Ibid, p. 246.
\(^{29}\) President Finney, Memoirs, p. 34, quoted in ibid.
non-literally. For instance, this account uses a simile to describe the quality of the experience quite self-awarely:

As I was walking in a thick grove, unspeakable glory seemed to open to the apprehension of my soul. I do not mean any external brightness, for I saw no such thing, nor any imagination of a body of light in the third heavens, or anything of that nature, but it was a new inward apprehension or view that I had of God.\(^{30}\)

Other examples include these comments extracted from Starbuck’s collection: ‘suddenly the darkness of the night seemed lit up’; ‘Immediately, like a flash of light, there came to me a great peace’; ‘There was no fire and no light in the room; nevertheless it appeared to me as if it were perfectly light.’\(^{31}\) It is trickier to identify reports that should be understood metaphorically, as usually in metaphor there is not a linguistic marker (such as the words ‘like’ or ‘as’ in similes) to suggest that the reading should be metaphorical rather than literal. The reader needs to rely on either contextual features, or sometimes a feeling of incongruence if taken literally. For instance, it makes little sense to take the claim ‘Juliet is the sun’ literally,\(^{32}\) and this incongruence leads the reader to search for a non-literal interpretation. This is not always going to be sufficient in the case of reported religious experiences, as these events are often bizarre and unusual, so a literal reading will be harder to rule out. Thus it will sometimes be unclear whether, and to what extent, reports of religious experiences should be taken literally. Even once such cases are weeded out, as long as there are some genuine reports of a genuine phenomenon, then religious experiences can be a way religious beliefs form, and which form part of a religious conversion.

Not all conversions involve religious experiences of this kind. However, religious experiences are sometimes claimed to be ‘conversion experiences’, meaning that sometimes a religious experience is cited as the explanation, cause, or trigger for a religious conversion. Religious experiences can be intense and life changing, and sometimes seem to lead to a conversion occurring suddenly and over a very short period of time, and so are very interesting in terms of religious conversion. The model of religious conversion I present in this thesis will be able to account for the difference between sudden and gradual conversions, and shed light on the role of


\(^{31}\)Quoted in ibid, pp. 248-9. Emphasis added.

\(^{32}\)Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, Act 2, Scene 2.
conversion experiences too.

Once a religious belief has formed, in one of the ways described, more beliefs are likely to follow. That is, once a single religious belief is part of the belief set, new input is more likely to be interpreted in such a way as to add to the religious belief set. According to Kuhn, the nature of perception is something that is susceptible to change as the result of a scientific revolution, due to the ‘theory dependence of perception’\(^\text{33}\). Kuhn claimed that ‘the nature of observation may be influenced by prior beliefs and experiences. Consequently it cannot be expected that two scientists when observing the same scene will make the same theory-neutral observations. Kuhn asserts that Galileo and an Aristotelian when both looking at a pendulum will see different things’\(^\text{34}\). In §1.1.2 I argued that religious conversions involve paradigm shifts – ‘A shift in paradigm can lead, via the theory-dependence of observation, to a difference in one's experiences of things and thus to a change in one’s phenomenal world.’\(^\text{35}\) Thus if the analogy between scientific revolutions and religious conversions outlined in §1.1.2 holds, then by extension, the nature of perception may change as the result of a religious conversion. Once a certain theory is adopted – once a religious belief is formed – this can change the subsequent experiences that one has, which in turn will influence which further beliefs are adopted. In this way, the adoption of one religious belief may initiate a cascade of others. From the initial formation of one religious belief, all subsequent experiences are more likely to be experienced in such a way as to confirm that belief, and additionally, to be interpreted in such a way as to lead to the formation of other beliefs that are consistent with it. In psychology the phenomenon of confirmation bias supports this claim. Confirmation bias is the tendency for individuals to seek out confirmation of their existing beliefs, and to interpret their experiences in ways that are compatible with those pre-existing beliefs\(^\text{36}\).

The flip side of this, is that without occupying a certain paradigm, one may be unable, or at least unlikely, to form a certain belief when exposed to evidence for that belief. There may be certain prerequisites for the formation of some religious beliefs. Obvious examples are those where a pre-existing belief is a prerequisite for forming a belief that depends on that pre-existing belief, such as that one must already believe

\(^{33}\) Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

\(^{34}\) Bird, ‘Kuhn’.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

that God exists before they can (sensibly) believe that God acts in the world. Sometimes a pre-requisite could be a non-doxastic state, for example a state of acceptance, a certain emotional state, attention, or openness (what Cottingham calls a ‘mode of receptivity’). That is, if someone is not paying attention to the relevant details, they cannot be affected by them in the right way, and if someone is simply not open to a particular view, then they will not engage with it in the right way either. This is captured by Pascal’s warning that ‘ordinary people have the power of not thinking of that about which they do not wish to think.’ If we refuse to engage in a reasonable way, we may form and retain false beliefs, and fail to acquire true beliefs.

These prerequisites will need to be in place before certain religious beliefs can form, and so it is arguable that, given these occur prior to, and are necessary for the formation of religious belief, these changes are also interesting in relation to understanding religious conversion. These changes do not entail that a conversion will take place because without being exposed to the relevant stimulus, experience, or evidence, the religious beliefs may not actually form. Additionally, these changes are not in themselves sufficient for a religious conversion, as by themselves they may have little or no effect on the life of the individual. Thus, a person may be in this state without being aware of it as such (they may be aware of certain features, but not of the significance of these features in terms of their receptivity to religion). The content of these prerequisites may be different for different individuals, and this may explain why different individuals form beliefs with different content even in response to the same stimulus.

The following extracts are taken from a first person account of a religious conversion, by an individual born in Ukraine in 1976. The first is an account of a memory of an event from his early childhood in Ukraine:

The first time I heard the call of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was on a warm spring night. On an evening walk through my native Zhytomyr with my mom I actually wandered into a Church. The door was wide open and deep inside the surprisingly well lit area I saw icons, candles and other fascinating items that seemed strange but at the same time warm and comforting. The big room was empty, save for a stocky middle aged man wearing a cassock! I was mesmerized by the beauty of the

38 Pascal, *Pensées*, §IV, 259.
iconography on the walls and didn’t notice the man approach me. When I finally turned my head he was right in front of me. His face seemed to be radiating kindness. The man smiled warmly and reached out his hand. In it he held a slice of watermelon. I took it, and my mother who by that time had caught up with me and was standing to my right told me to thank the kind Priest. The Priest smiled again, told us that it was nothing and than said something that completely puzzled and bewildered me. “Hrysts Voskrese!” which translates from Ukrainian as “Christ is Risen”.39

He later emigrated with his family to America, and he later made the following observation:

Another amazing thing that I began to notice was the fact that every time I happened to walk by an Orthodox Church, every time I saw the Cross, every time I looked upon golden cupola I felt an unexplainable urge, a pulling of some kind. My whole being was drawn to Christ, yet I still didn’t completely understand.40

The effect of this early experience clearly affected his later interactions with the Church. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that had he happened to wander into the holy building of another faith, the details of his conversion may have changed accordingly, and that had no such event occurred, he might never have had a religious conversion at all. The accidents of which religion your community, spouse, or parents adhere to (and whether these factors create attraction or aversion), which places of worship are accessible, which philosophies or atmospheres suit your personality, values, and prior commitments, are all relevant to (but do not determine) which religious beliefs one may come to hold, and which religious faith one may convert to.

Aside from its relevance to the topic of religious conversion, this result would have significant implications for the discourse between those occupying different paradigms – it would make arbitration by reference to some external observation less successful, and the ability to occupy another’s paradigm would be limited by our ability to see the world in the same way. Revisiting my earlier analogy with scientific revolution:

40 Ibid.
the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds. One contains constrained bodies that fall slowly, the other pendulums that repeat their motions again and again. In one, solutions are compounds, in the other mixtures. One is embedded in a flat, the other in a curved, matrix of space. Practicing in different worlds, the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction.41

Likewise, one may see the very same picture as a duck or rabbit, as a portrait of Gala or Lincoln, depending on the paradigm and the focus of attention.

2.4. The justification of religious beliefs.

In the epistemological context ‘justification’ normally means something quite specific, namely, the proper reasons one has for holding a belief. These proper reasons need to be rational and connected appropriately with the content of the belief, often via evidence for that belief. However, we also talk about emotions being justified, and behaviour being justified, and here we might mean something slightly different. I will distinguish three senses in which something can count as ‘justified’ and argue that beliefs can be justified in all three of these ways. I will call these ways epistemic, moral, and pragmatic. If all three ways of a belief being justified are genuine forms of justification, then one might be able to have a justified belief even when one or even two of these forms of justification are (so far) absent.

These types of justification are not contraries but are actually complementaries. We can use all of these yardsticks. When we cannot determine whether something is standardly rational, it is standardly rational to defer to pragmatic rationality. Sometimes it is more appropriate to use one rather than another. In the present context, epistemic justification is often deemed to be more pertinent. In the coming chapters, we’ll see that emotions can be justified or unjustified, and here the most pertinent aspect is moral justification, and that behaviour can also be justified or unjustified and here the most pertinent type is pragmatic justification. However, all of these types can be relevant in any of these domains.

An important implication of this concerns the way that religious beliefs are sometimes evaluated. Some critiques of religious belief conclude that religious beliefs

41 Kuhn, p. 150.
are not epistemically justified and therefore one is not justified in holding that belief. The conclusions have rested on a premise that evidence is the only, or at least, the primary source of justification. If this is wrong, we are looking in the wrong place when we come to assess religious beliefs solely on rational grounds, or at least, if we understand ‘rational grounds’ to be only those grounds based on evidence of the type we would expect in our scientific beliefs. Justification links with the broader notion of rationality in the following way: if a belief is justified, then it is rational to hold it. If a belief is rational, then one is justified in holding it. This is not to say that justification and rationality are synonymous, but for the current purpose, they will occur together. I now discuss each kind of justification in relation to religious beliefs in turn.

2.4.1. Moral justification.

Here I will claim that beliefs are ethically evaluable, so could be classed as either morally justified, or morally unjustified. Amesbury points out that the ‘moral dimension [of belief] is a result of the fact that belief is not a purely private matter, or one that can be partitioned off from other aspects of life: one's beliefs have consequences for others, as well as for oneself.’ Amesbury, ‘The Virtues of Belief – Towards a Non-Evidentialist Ethics of Belief-Formation’, p. 27. Clifford wrote that ‘it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence.’ Clifford, William K., ‘The Ethics of Belief’, [1879], The Ethics of Belief and Other Essays, Prometheus Books, (1999), p. ix.

If Clifford is right, then the way to determine, for any particular instance of religious belief, whether it should be evaluated in a positive or a negative light would be to determine whether that belief was formed on sufficient evidence. That it is wrong for someone to believe something on insufficient evidence may be taken to imply both that it is possible to form beliefs on insufficient evidence and that we can be held morally responsible for our beliefs.

In this case, it seems as though moral justification would be strongly linked to epistemic justification, in that beliefs will be morally justified only if they are epistemically justified. However, James argues that in cases where certain criteria are met the evidentialist requirement that one has sufficient evidence should be loosened. The criteria according to James are that a hypothesis must be ‘live’ (rather than ‘dead’), the decision between two hypotheses must be ‘forced’ (rather than

42 Amesbury, ‘The Virtues of Belief – Towards a Non-Evidentialist Ethics of Belief-Formation’, p. 27.
‘avoidable’) and the decision about the hypothesis must be ‘momentous’ (rather than ‘trivial’).  

A live hypothesis is one that is a real possibility relative to a particular person or group of people – so for people today, belief in the Greek gods is not a live hypothesis, but for the ancient Greeks it was. The liveness of a hypothesis can be measured in degrees, so for someone who grows up with Christian parents, hypotheses relating to a Christian God are more live than for someone who grows up in an atheist household in a Christian country, which in turn is more live than for someone who grows up in a non-Christian country but who is somewhat aware of the existence of the Christian religion, but it would not be a live possibility for someone alive before the advent of Christianity. An option is forced when there are only two options, and withholding belief will bring you down on one side so that one cannot stay neutral. An hypothesis will be momentous in case it will have multifarious consequences and effect many other beliefs, feelings, actions, and so on, in a person’s life. Some beliefs are unmomentous – for example my belief that it is raining in China has almost no consequence, arouses very little feeling, and will not affect my behaviour one jot. Whether a hypothesis is momentous will vary from person to person; to a Chinese farmer during a drought, this proposition may be momentous. When an option is live, forced, and momentous, it is called a ‘genuine option’.

If James is right, then people can believe religious hypotheses even without sufficient evidence with impunity, whenever a hypothesis is a genuine option for them. Religious beliefs will be a genuine option for many people. Take a religious belief like ‘God exists’. While this is vague and context sensitive, for any precisified value of ‘x’ in ‘∃x’, this is a forced option for everyone, because there are only two options, and withholding belief is as unreligious as believing that the religious hypotheses are false:

Our passional nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option between propositions, whenever it is a genuine option that cannot by its nature be decided on intellectual grounds; for to say, under such circumstances, “Do not decide, but leave

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45 The fact that ‘liveness’ comes in degrees may be seen by some as a problem. As my comments on vagueness in §1.2.3 made clear, vague concepts are still usable, and while it may therefore be tricky to know in some borderline cases whether a belief counts as live for a person, this doesn’t undermine my argument.
It will be momentous for very many people, because it has the magnitude to affect almost every aspect of a person’s life if it is fully integrated as a belief (as we have seen, it will lead to the formation of other beliefs, and can motivate behaviour, and we will come to see that it will also have consequences for the emotions). The option is live for many people. An option that was not live may become so under some of the conditions mentioned previously under which conversions often occur, for instance when one becomes more intimately acquainted with a religion they were previously not exposed to or when they have a personal crisis that forces them to challenge their existing paradigm. It may not always be obvious whether it is live for an individual, but there will be clear cases in which the option is live, clear cases in which it is dead, and a penumbra of borderline cases where the question of whether it is live will be unclear.

James mentions another case where it is morally acceptable to believe something on insufficient evidence, which is that belief in the truth of the proposition constitutes, or can help to bring about, that proposition being true. For example, if a person believes they will survive a cancer, they are more likely to do so due to the positive psychosomatic effect that such a belief may have. Obviously someone’s belief that God exists cannot in anyway affect the truth of that proposition, but this condition might apply to other religious beliefs. For example, take the belief that prayer is efficacious. If one strongly believes this, and prays to be cured of an illness, this belief would be just as effective on a psychosomatic level as the belief that one would survive a cancer, and the prayer would play the role of a placebo.

A ‘placebo’ is an effect whereby what has the efficacy in bringing about the change in question is some aspect of the subject’s subjective psychological response to the event or substance in question, not the event or substance itself. Where a subject is more credulous and suggestible, the placebo effect can be stronger and occur in a wider range of circumstances (which is especially relevant given that this is

46 James, ‘The Will to Believe’, p. 11. Original emphasis.
47 This assumes a realist interpretation – this wouldn’t hold if we were radical idealists.
48 The stigma attached to the notion of the ‘placebo’ is not intended here, as despite some tendencies for people to dismiss these effects as not really ‘real’ or ‘all in the head’, the effects can be just as real and physiologically grounded as the effects where the cause is purely physical.
a feature of the personality of sudden religious converts, according to James).\textsuperscript{49} Placebos can be intended or inadvertent. A placebo is intended wherever it is administered with the aim of bringing about a placebo effect, for example when a doctor prescribes vitamin pills for a medically incurable disease with the intention of bringing about beneficial placebo effects. A placebo is inadvertent when there is no such intention, for example where a doctor prescribes an ineffective medicine that he nevertheless believes is effective.\textsuperscript{50} Here the placebo effect is still achieved because the patient still expects a positive effect. In the case of religious conversion, the placebo effect would normally be inadvertent because the convert has not been manipulated, but nevertheless might end up having beneficial results due to the conversion experience that are brought about not as a result of the experience itself but his beliefs or expectations about it.\textsuperscript{51}

A consequence of the efficacy of the placebo effect would be that it may be more difficult to establish the cause of the positive results experienced by converts after a religious conversion, or more specifically in this example, if a prayer has positive effects because of their positive beliefs about that experience, or due to the presence of a divine reality. Thus it may be harder to ascertain whether the beliefs formed have epistemic justification. It is difficult to determine the presence of and effect of placebos, partly because the placebo effect is often not the only factor and doesn’t happen in isolation from other variables. It can therefore be difficult to quantify. For example, take the following cases:

(1) A patient takes a pain killer, and expects that it will work.
(2) A patient takes a pain killer, and expects that it will not work.
(3) A patient takes a placebo, and expects that it will work.
(4) A patient takes a placebo, and expects that it will not work.

In all four cases, assume that there are no other causes that have an effect on the amount of pain over the period over which the results are being measured and imagine to that there is a reliable way of measuring the pain. In (1) we would expect that the

\textsuperscript{49} James, pp. 229-30 and pp. 232-3.
\textsuperscript{51} It is possible that an intended placebo effect is brought about when converts are manipulated, for instance by a cult leader or sham missionary.
pain will reduce, but the distribution of this reduction that should be attributed to the
effects of the painkiller and the effects of the placebo involved with the expectation of
pain relief will be difficult to calculate. It would seem that the answer is to compare
this amount of reduction to a control case where a painkiller is taken with no positive
expectation, as in (2). In (2) any pain reduction will be attributable to the effect of the
painkiller but there might in this case be a ‘negative placebo’ effect, that is, it might
be less effective in this case than in one where there is a neutral expectation or no
expectation at all. The latter would be achievable if the patient was unaware they had
taken a pain killer at all, so this would be the control needed to attribute the effects in
(1). In (3) we might predict a reduction in pain and any reduction in pain can be
attributed to the placebo effect. In (4) we would expect no change to the pain state.

In the case of conversion, it will be very difficult to control for the placebo
effect because we have no way of knowing in advance whether there is any real
divine influence, and because subjects will have so many differences that controlling
for all variables will be next to impossible. To answer the question of whether belief
in the efficacy of prayer brings about a sense in which prayer can be efficacious is
thus not straightforward, and therefore it is not straightforward to determine whether
the belief has moral justification. Whether or not the prayer acts as a placebo, if it has
a beneficial result then one may form the belief that the prayer is efficacious. It is not
that God has answered the prayer that is made true by having the belief. And so in
this sense, belief in the efficacy of prayer does not bring about the truth that God
answers prayers. It was rather the belief that the prayer would work, that may have
contributed to a state of mind that may have been more relaxed, meditative, and
positive that may have allowed the healing to take place, so in effect, the prayer is
effective, in that the belief that ‘praying will make me more likely to be cured of my
illness’ would be true, even if the person’s reasons for thinking this might be way off
the mark. For instance, someone may believe it was divine intervention when in fact
the calm and meditative state of praying allowed the adrenal system to rest and the
immune system to work more effectively, resulting in healing. However, it may not be
possible to hold the belief that the prayer would increase the chances of recovery
without a suitable meta-belief about why, and the calmer state may not be
successfully achieved by prayer without a belief that allows this state to be reached
(that is, without believing in something like divine intervention). So the meta-belief
about divine intervention may still be instrumental in this example in that the belief in
the efficacy is what allowed the calm state to be attained. Thus the relation between the prayer and God are important aspects of the belief state if it is to work effectively as a placebo. In which case, in a less direct way, the belief that God answers prayers may be morally justified, because this belief brings about the truth of the result we would expect to see were that belief true. However, it would not be morally justified whenever the prayer did not contribute to the realisation of the intention of that prayer.

To summarise the discussion of whether religious beliefs are morally justified, I have concluded that such beliefs are morally justified if they are either: (a) formed upon sufficient evidence; (b) genuine options; or, (c) such that believing the religious claim will itself contribute to bringing about the truth of the claim. I’ve claimed that (b) and (c) may sometimes apply. Given that saying that a belief is formed upon sufficient evidence is another way of saying that it has epistemic justification, I will turn to this in the next section.

2.4.2. Epistemic justification.

A belief will be epistemically justified just in case the belief is suitably connected to the object of belief. This connection is often deemed to be via evidence, or reasons. This could come from any of the three routes to belief formation I’ve outlined: through the consideration of sound arguments; through reliable testimony, and; through sensory evidence. Typically, the soundness of religious arguments and the reliability of religious testimony will be assessed in the same way as any other argument or testimony. However, there are some interesting differences when it comes to sensory evidence, since experience of the world via our senses is not, perhaps, exactly the same as what goes on in religious experiences. I will therefore focus this discussion on the justification of beliefs formed on the basis of religious experience.

A second reason for focusing on experience is that both the other methods of belief formation ultimately have their justification grounded in experience too. Justification for believing the conclusions of religious arguments will depend on the justification for the truth of the premises. Where these are justified by further arguments these too will need to be examined, but ultimately there will (unless circular or merely demonstrating analytic truths) be justification (or lack thereof)
grounded in one of the other two methods (or others not considered here). Justification gained by testimony will rest on claims about the reliability of that testimony and also the justification that the person giving testimony has themselves, otherwise the only support the testimony could offer would be a fallacious appeal to authority if the person is considered a religious ‘expert’ (as in the case of a religious official or missionary) or a fallacious *ad populum* claim, if it is the views of a community or culture. If the source of the person giving testimony is in turn from another person’s testimony, this can be checked for reliability too and will ultimately need to rest on one of the other two methods. This leaves religious experience as the most fundamental source of justification.

If a belief is formed on the basis of religious experience then the experience must be indicative of the truth of that belief in order for it to count as justified. Without this justification one will not have good reason to convert to a religion merely on the basis of these beliefs.\textsuperscript{52} I will outline a general argument that attempts to show that religious experiences (conversion experiences being among these) are indicative of a transcendent reality, which I’ll call the ‘argument from credulity’. I shall focus on experiences of God in particular, which I take to be a subset of religious experiences.\textsuperscript{53}

Richard Swinburne outlines what he calls the ‘Principle of Credulity’.\textsuperscript{54} The principle states that if x appears perceptually to be present, then probably x is present. This probability would justify believing that x was present. This principle applied to sense experience seems plausible – if I seem to see a barn, then there probably is a barn (that is, it is more plausible, prima facie, that there is a barn than that there is not). This applies unless there is some sufficient reason to think that there is not a barn, for example because I know I have taken a hallucinogen, or because I am in fake-barn country.\textsuperscript{55} Swinburne thinks this principle is indispensible short of succumbing to scepticism, since if we could not reasonably believe things to be the

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\textsuperscript{52}There are of course other reasons that one might have for converting, for example, if the religious conversion would improve my moral life this would count as a reason. If it were the religious experience that inspired such a moral shift, then we could say that it is pragmatically justified if the consequences of converting are better than the consequences of not converting.

\textsuperscript{53}I have no reason to suppose that the criteria would be any different for experiences of other realities, so I take it that this applies *mutatis mutandis* to religious experiences of other things too: if you prefer, you can substitute for the term ‘God’ another object of religious experience such as ‘Allah’ or ‘the Virgin Mary’.


way they appear (when there are no strong reasons to think otherwise)\textsuperscript{56} we would never be able to know anything on the basis of our experiences. The controversial step Swinburne takes is to apply this to religious experiences too. The principle of credulity applied to religious experiences then, purportedly allows one to reasonably conclude on the basis of the occurrence of religious experiences of God that there is such a God – unless there are reasons to think that the experiences are not veridical.\textsuperscript{57}

Thus, on the assumption that there are at least some religious experiences of the suitable kind, the enthymematic version of the argument claims that:

(P1): If we have apparent perceptions of God then probably God exists, unless there are sufficient defeaters.

(P2): In conversion experiences sometimes there are apparent perceptions of God.

(P3): There are no sufficient defeaters.

∴ (C4): Probably God exists.

∴ (C5): Conversion experiences sometimes justify the belief that God exists.

I think there is a successful objection to this argument. Draper claims that the principle of credulity is not universally reasonable; therefore there will be false instances of it.\textsuperscript{58} If the principle of credulity should not apply to religious experiences then P1 would be false. He claims that, although the principle is a fundamental and important one, as we become epistemologically mature it gets modified to accord with different sorts of perceptual claims and things we learn about their reliability. Many experiences are still treated with a high degree of credulity once this maturity has been reached, but other experiences we learn to treat with initial scepticism rather than credulity. For instance, it would be irrational to be credulous that space aliens abduct people based on people’s claims to have experienced abduction, just because we have not got a sufficient defeater for their claims. In order for such claims to be credible, for Draper, it is not just necessary that they have not got a defeater, but also


\textsuperscript{57} I will not address the issue of whether such experiences need to be first person, or whether the experience of another can be grounds for me to believe, as this raises epistemological issues which cannot be settled here.

that the evidence is suitably enhanced.

To distinguish between experiences that can be treated with initial credulity and those which require enhancers Draper makes the following guiding remarks: (1) the more specific the claim, the weaker the evidence for that claim provided by the perceptual experience; (2) the more significant a claim, the more initial scepticism it should be treated with; (3) claims about extraordinary objects are prima facie less probable than claims about mundane objects; and (4) claims made on the basis of an extraordinary mode of perception should initially be treated with more scepticism than claims made on the basis of sense perceptions. I’ll briefly discuss these in order.

There is some debate about the specificity of the claims made on the basis of religious experiences. Lots of claims are highly specific, but this might be the result of a degree of interpretation applied by an individual. If there could be a less specific core experience that is nonspecific enough to allow the principle of credulity to apply, then the fact that some people deliver a highly specific version of their experience would mean that the specific version may not be justified, while leaving room for the claim that experiences can justify some more general (less specific) beliefs. The descriptions given of religious experiences are often unspecific. When they are more specific, it might not be due to the fact that the experience itself gave rise to the specific propositional content of the doctrinal beliefs that arise, but rather, that the experience was processed through the lens of what the subject already expected, knew, or believed about the experience, and what they are later told about it by others, particularly religious authorities. Thus only the less specific claims could lay claim to epistemic justification on the basis of the experience.

Upholding the second condition, that the more significant a claim is the more stringent the demands on its justification should be, seems epistemically responsible. Mundane and trivial claims lead to mundane and trivial consequences if they are wrong, but the more that rests on the claim the harder we should work to epistemically support it. Religious claims are certainly very significant given the wide reaching changes that occur in those who form these beliefs in conversion, and the impact religious beliefs have on society at large.

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59 This is a view held by perennialists, who think that there is a single universal truth that finds expression differently in different religions and at different times. (Gellman, Jerome, ‘Mysticism’, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/mysticism/ §4.) The differences between religions is thus a difference in interpretation of the universal truth are therefore social, cultural, and psychological.
The third condition that we should be more sceptical of extraordinary objects is also plausible. However, it is not obvious whether one should see God as an extraordinary object. For the Pantheist, God is not extraordinary, but the summation of everything that is ordinary. For others, God cannot be seen as any kind of object, extraordinary or otherwise. However, many religious claims involve a God that is less ordinary than the objects of sense perception. However, he is also significantly unlike some other extraordinary objects, such as aliens or Big Foot. We can conclude that for those claims that do concern an extraordinary object they are going to require more stringent epistemic justification than those that don’t.

The fourth claim that we should be more sceptical about extraordinary modes of perception is also reasonable, in particular because religious experiences are unpredictable, and it is unclear what conditions are to count as ‘normal’ for the kind of ‘perception’ involved in religious experiences. If religious experiences are perceived by a sensus divinitatis, this should be treated with more initial scepticism. Thus at least in some cases, religious claims will be specific, significant, about extraordinary objects, and/or perceived via an extraordinary mode of perception. In such cases, initial scepticism is more appropriate than credulity, and thus the application of the principle of credulity to religious experiences is not appropriate in all cases. Draper argues on the contrary that the principle of credulity should not apply to them for epistemically mature individuals.

Another argument for the epistemic justification of religious beliefs based on religious experience is the argument from analogy. This argument claims that as perceptual experiences can be veridical, and there is a sufficiently close analogy between perceptual experience and religious experience, we are justified in thinking that religious experiences can also be veridical. A mode of experience is veridical if it provides the truth. When it comes to sense perception, there is a cluster of tests that aim to show that those experiences passing the tests are veridical.60 Defenders of the

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60 Although there are more tests discussed in the literature than I discuss here, I don’t include tests that are eliminative – that is, tests that cannot tell us that an experience has any more probability of being veridical, so even if the experience passes these test it would still not be sufficient to conclude that God exists. For instance, tests that focus on the need for experiences to be either logically or empirically consistent with other ‘facts’ or experiences. These cannot stipulate what counts as a ‘fact’ without being arbitrary – for instance, an atheist will gladly take ‘God does not exist’ to be a known fact, while the theist will not. Restriction to claims which are ‘known’ by everyone probably excludes all claims, while restriction to facts known by everyone in a particular culture, society, or religious group arbitrarily discriminates against the known facts held true by excluded groups. Wainwright attempts to
claim that there is a sufficient analogy between religious experience and ordinary experience argue that these tests can apply in an analogous way *mutatis mutandis*, to ascertain the veridicality of religious experiences. If religious conversion experiences pass a sufficient number of these tests then it will show that they are veridical, and if they are veridical then the subjects of religious conversion experiences can take these experiences as an epistemically justifying reason to hold the beliefs that arise from them.  

If religious experiences are not veridical then they would not give epistemically justifying reasons to form beliefs about the objects of those religious experiences. If it turns out that the tests are not fair tests for the veridicality of religious experience, then this will destroy the analogy, so in this case the argument from analogy would fail to show that we are justified in believing religious propositions on the basis of religious experiences.

One test for the veridicality of sense-experience is that we would expect continuity between contents in some law-like manner. In the case of sense perception, if an object is present, *all* those suitably exposed to it ought to perceive it, and this experience would be repeatable under the same conditions. Draper makes a convincing case for failure of this test. Whilst there are law-like regularities in the case of sense perceptions, there are not in the case of religious experiences, and this disanalogy is epistemically significant. Sometimes different people, or the same person on different occasions, can be in the *same* position in all the relevant ways (physical location, hours of meditation, time since last meal… whatever one might consider relevant) and yet have a religious experience in one case and not in the other.

solve this issue by including the following two conditions as tests for veridicality which require consistency with known facts:

2. We must ‘take the pronouncements of authority into account. In some communities the word of the spiritual director, or guru or master is final.’ (Ibid, p. 262.)

However, these conditions are fallacious appeals to tradition and to authority, and discriminate against the unconventional or minority beliefs. Thus these ‘conditions’ are no guide to truth at all, unless the orthodoxy can be independently justified or shown to sufficiently correlate with truth.

A defeating condition can be understood as a flunked test, so if religious experiences flunk these tests it will also render P3 of the argument from credulity (that there are no sufficient defeaters) false.

Wainwright disagrees with this, as he claims that the mystic can prescribe ‘a regimen, a mode of procedure, which is likely to lead to introvertive experiences’, p. 263. I would simply point out that here, the operative word is ‘likely’. One does not usually consider ‘likelihood’ sufficient for ‘law-like’ governance.
Unlike in the case of objects of sense perception where if there is a table under suitable conditions we do have an experience of it, one may not have a religious experience even if God is present (in some loose sense) and the conditions are fitting. So not having a religious experience is then not grounds for concluding that God is not present.

This creates a situation where, according to supporters of the argument from analogy, having an experience of God counts in favour of God’s existence, but not having an experience of God does not diminish the possibility of God’s existence. This ‘heads I win, tails you lose’ situation doesn’t seem like the best basis for a plausible account of the justificatory force of religious experiences. This state of affairs counts as a defeater by both lowering the antecedent probability of the experience given that the claim is true and by raising the antecedent probability of the experience given that the claim is false. The actual distribution of religious experiences is also what we would expect on the hypothesis that God does not exist.

Wainwright and Alston claim that this disanalogy is not significant because of the nature of the object we ‘perceive’ in religious experiences – as God chooses to reveal himself based on considerations we are not (and perhaps cannot be) aware of, the lack of regularity is exactly what we should expect assuming God exists and is the cause of our experience. The point they seem to be making is that because of the difference in the nature of the object of religious experiences from the objects of ordinary sense perception, we cannot expect there to be the same tests, and so genuine experiences of God would not be supported, confirmed or disconfirmed in the same way. This, however, seems to be simply conceding the vital point – there is a significant and relevant disanalogy between the two kinds of experience and so this counts against the argument that the veridicality of one kind is reason to believe that the other kind is also veridical.

Another test for veridicality is that there is likely to be agreement between different subjects, when both subjects had the experience under normal or standard conditions. What the ‘normal’ or ‘standard’ conditions for a religious experience are

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65 What ‘standard conditions’ are is difficult enough to ascertain with sense experience, but might include things like healthy organs, no significant deprivations, no significant physiological influences –
is not clear, although typically things like meditation, prayer, breathing exercises, and asceticism might be included as conditions that would increase the likelihood of religious experience and so be considered normal. However, not all religious experiences are preceded by these (or any other) special activities, and not all activities of these kinds lead to religious experiences. If under normal conditions we sometimes saw tigers when there were none, and sometimes failed to see them when there were, we would consider this to be evidence against the veridicality of tiger perceptions. Likewise, in every case where two subjects disagreed about the presence of a tiger we would conclude either that one person is not in standard conditions, or that the disagreement is significant. However, for defenders of the analogy between sense experience and religious experience, the analogue of this feature of sense experiences does not apply to religious experiences.

Wainwright thinks that we should not worry about agreement between those who do not lead the prescribed mystical lifestyle (for example, a religious life of mystical experience educating practices like meditation and asceticism). Those people without the necessary ‘discipline’ do not count. We might be able to rectify the appearance of a disanalogy here between the agreement between subjects of perceptual experience and the lack of agreement between subjects of religious experiences, and in particular the fact that perceptual experiences, but not religious experiences, tend to occur for all subjects under normal conditions. In perceptual experience, where one subject is blind, they will not experience the colour change that a sighted subject would experience. And if a colour blind person sees a red and green picture they will not have the experience that a well-sighted person would. We can explain the lack of regularity and agreement in religious experiences by analogy with these perceptual examples. In the case where someone doesn’t have a religious experience, it could be that they have a similar lack, or inability or insensitivity that prevents them from seeing what is there. A more fitting analogy might be that certain aspects of poetry or music are able to be enjoyed only after years of study and a well trained sensibility for the subtleties of the art. A less experienced person may simply miss what for the connoisseur is pertinent.

However, in this case it would be unusual for people to become religious due to religious experiences, as it would be unlikely that someone who is not already like drugs or alcohol – white light, suitable situation relative to the object, no holographic equipment etcetera.
religious would be leading such a lifestyle. If we agree with Wainwright, we must also agree that religious conversion experiences will not be epistemically justified. Additionally, unless there is some prior reason for giving more weight to the experience had by ‘religious connoisseurs’ (so to speak) we may have just as much reason to claim that the disagreement between subjects can be reduced, if not dissolved, by claiming that in all cases of disagreement at least one of the parties counts as an unreliable subject.

The reliability of the subject also counts as a test for veridicality in its own right. Subjects are not considered reliable when they are in abnormal physiological or psychological states, and in such cases subjects tend to have more non-veridical experiences. Such subjects do have veridical and non-veridical experiences, so failing this test doesn’t show that the experiences are not veridical, just that they cannot be relied on to be veridical – which is enough to claim that believing the content of the experience without sufficient enhancers would be epistemically unjustified. Such ‘abnormal’ conditions include (but aren’t limited to):

1. Hyper suggestibility.
2. Severe deprivation (for example of sleep, food, or water).
3. Severe sexual frustration.
4. Intense fear of death.
5. Infantile regression.
6. Maladjustment.
7. Mental illness or psychosis.
8. Unusual neurological happenings or physiological states (including medical conditions, and drug use, dependency and withdrawal).

Under all of these conditions the subject cannot be relied upon to have veridical experiences. Some of the conditions that are most often reported to precede religious experiences count as abnormal according to the above list. Spiritual practices such as long periods of meditation or fasting lead to (2), severe deprivation; chastity may lead to (3), sexual frustration; near death experiences or the death of a loved one may involve (4), intense fear of death; and alcohol and drug addiction may involve (8), unusual physiology (as well as be a symptom of (6), maladjustment or a self-medication for (7) mental illness of psychosis). These correspond to the conditions
under which many ‘sudden’ conversions occur. Therefore, for many subjects, their religious experience will be unreliable and therefore the beliefs they form on the basis of such experiences will not have epistemic justification.

The conclusion reached is that there are serious doubts about whether religious experience can satisfy the kinds of test for veridicality that are normally accepted in standard non-religious cases where the veridicality of an experience is being assessed. It is possible that some cases may avoid all of the exceptions mentioned in this section and therefore acquire the elusive status of epistemic justification, but this will be difficult to ascertain.

2.4.3. Pragmatic justification.

The final kind of justification I consider is pragmatic justification. By this, I mean that according to various principles about what makes things go better or makes our lives function better, we have (all things considered) more reason to do something rather than not to do it. James claims that some things ‘cannot by [their] nature be decided on intellectual grounds’, but instead the ‘evidence might be forever withheld from us unless we met the hypothesis half-way’.66 James thinks that (certain) religious beliefs are of this kind, because they ‘cannot be verified scientifically at all’.67 In any case, I have noted throughout this chapter that our belief formation is somewhat haphazard, that it is subject to cognitive errors, inattention, and any number of other ‘flaws’. Given such a system, is it still reasonable to evaluate them in the way implicit in much philosophical discussion – is it not unreasonable to demand perfection where there can be none? Rott says:

logicians have come to realize that most of our reasoning proceeds on the basis of incomplete knowledge and insufficient evidence. Implicit assumptions about the normal state and development of the world, also known as expectations, presumptions, prejudices or defaults, step in to fill the gaps in the reasoner's body of knowledge. These default assumptions form the context for ordinary reasoning processes. They help us to generate conclusions that are necessary for reaching decisions about how to act, but they are retractable if further evidence arises. Thus

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66 James, ‘The Will to Believe’, p. 28. It might be through faith/acceptance that one gets to be half way. Acceptance will be discussed in §4.3.
67 James, ‘The Will to Believe’, p. 25.
our inferences will in many contexts be defeasible or non-monotonic in the sense that an extension of the set of premises does not generally result in an increase of the set of legitimate conclusions.\footnote{Rott, Hans, ‘A Counterexample to Six Fundamental Principles of Belief Formation’, \textit{Synthese}, Vol. 139, No. 2, (Mar., 2004), p. 226.}

If religious beliefs are not the sort of belief that require evidence for epistemic justification, one might ‘feel that what is unreasonable is not their belief, but the demand that it be supported by evidence.’\footnote{Amesbury, ‘The Virtues of Belief – Towards a Non-Evidentialist Ethics of Belief-Formation’, p. 33.}

In \textit{On Certainty}, Wittgenstein points to beliefs that can be held without evidence, as ‘the grounds that [one] can give are no surer than [the] assertion’ that one seeks to justify.\footnote{Wittgenstein, Ludwig, \textit{On Certainty}, [1969], Blackwell, (2003), §243.} An example could be ‘The earth has existed for more than five minutes’. This proposition (and others like it) is not certain ‘because it is intrinsically obvious or convincing; it is rather held fast by what lies around it’.\footnote{Ibid, §144.} Here there is a departure from the Cartesian strategy of appealing to ‘clear and distinct’ or ‘intrinsically obvious’ ideas.\footnote{Descartes, Rene, \textit{Meditations on First Philosophy}, [1641], Ed. John Cottingham, Cambridge University Press, (1996), Meditation III, §35, p. 24.} Such beliefs are certain because they function ‘like a hinge on which other things turn, an axis around which they revolve’, and if the hinge or axis were removed, the entire structure that depends on it would collapse. Where such a collapse cannot be tolerated, the hinge proposition is not doubted. In the case of central religious beliefs, it seems clear that many of a person’s other beliefs, their way of being, of interacting with the world and other people, and their emotional lives, are radically affected by them to the extent that their removal would result in an upheaval of extreme proportions. More relevantly, adopting a belief like this (perhaps not immediately) can radically alter almost every other aspect of a person’s engagement with the world.

Such beliefs will not be responsive to evidence in the same way. Of course, they can (and under certain conditions will) be doubted and challenged. Yet the default position with them should not be the evidentialist ‘guilty until proven innocent’, but rather a more judicious ‘innocent until proven guilty’.\footnote{Here we have something like a principle of credulity again, but here held for a more profound and defensible reason.} That is, rather than demand that they should be evidenced sufficiently before they can justifiably be held, one
should claim that they are justifiably held until sufficient reason presents itself not to – and where the stakes are high, we can reasonably demand that the bar for sufficiency on this count be placed high. True, we cannot be certain of a proposition in the same way if it is not founded on evidence in the same way. However, Wittgenstein would claim that we do not need that certainty, and that ‘without appropriate grounds doubt can itself be irrational, and until doubts arise, we are within our rights to believe.’ From what we know so far about the way that certain religious beliefs are like new scientific discoveries that dramatically alter one’s paradigm, it is reasonable to suppose that some of these beliefs will underpin so much else, and be so integral to one’s being and functionality, that it would be more rational to allow a little confirmation bias to ease our journey than to attempt a revision of these beliefs every time something rose as an ostensible challenge to them. Therefore, where religious beliefs function as hinge beliefs they can be pragmatically justified. This will further depend on whether the role that the belief plays improves the life of the believer and those they affect. Where the belief leads to things like moral improvement, increased well-being and health, and improved functioning in society, it is pragmatically justified. Where the belief leads to maladjustment, ill-health, or moral corruption, it will not be.

2.5. Concluding remarks.

This chapter has aimed to investigate the doxastic dimension of religious conversion. I came to the following thoughts about religious beliefs: religious beliefs aim at truth; they can be held with degrees of credence; they can be latent; they can be held without first-person knowledge; they are not always subject to first-person authority; and beliefs can motivate or explain behaviour. I also considered three ways in which religious beliefs tend to be formed, namely, through rational argument, through third-person testimony, and through religious experience. I argued that as well as these things (which might be seen as ‘triggers’) there must be an appropriate mode of receptivity too. Given that the soil in which the seeds land will be different for each individual, and that there are many kinds of seed that can bear religious fruit, the trees will not look the same in all cases. The particular beliefs one adopts may be different according to various accidents.

Despite these differences, the process is similar, and the conditions that make for a suitable receptivity are also similar.

I then turned to the justification of religious beliefs, and distinguished between three types of justification: moral, epistemic, and pragmatic. I claimed that beliefs will be morally justified when (a) formed upon sufficient evidence; (b) genuine options, or; (c) such that believing the religious claim will itself contribute to bringing about the truth of the claim. I focussed further on (a) as beliefs formed upon sufficient evidence are those that are epistemically justified. I claimed that epistemic justification should include a suitable relationship between the content of the belief and the object of belief, and so considered an argument that attempted to show that religious conversion experiences are indicative of God, and therefore suitable as reasons for subjects to convert on that basis. To establish whether or not religious experiences were veridical I looked at some tests for veridicality. The disanalogy piled up in subsequent discussion, and it was established that unlike sense experience, we do not know how to judge the reliability of the subject or their extraordinary faculty of religious ‘perception’, there is no law-like governance of such experiences nor determinable standard conditions, and one can only remove disagreement between subjects by extinguishing the religious import of their claims. Finally, I claimed that pragmatic justification may be a more appropriate measure of religious beliefs under some circumstances, as religious beliefs may have pragmatic justification even when they don’t meet the criteria for epistemic justification. It might be that rather than taking religious experience as a kind of scientific evidence for the truth of religious beliefs, ‘[r]eligious experience can best be viewed like other general life experiences as events which shape an individual’s world view. Thus, individuals who have ‘had a witness of the Spirit’ or ‘felt the presence of God’ may be more likely to exhibit higher levels of religious feeling, beliefs, and behaviors.’ 75 Through the interconnectivity with these other dimensions, the network can provide pragmatic justification by making the beliefs fundamental to the individual and a large sphere of their inner and outer lives.

Some accounts of religious conversion focus purely on the cognitive, and so might leave the topic here, having discussed only the doxastic dimension. However conversion is not about mere cognitive change and so accounts focusing solely on the

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75 Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham and Pitcher, p. 232.
sphere of belief are not very promising. I now move on to discuss how religious experiences, and also beliefs, contribute to a powerful *non-cognitive* affect on the subject, to the emotional lives and behaviour of converts, and how these aspects are mutually interrelated.
CHAPTER 3

THE AFFECTIVE DIMENSION

‘both judgement and action lack the emotionality that is a requirement of virtue.’

I now turn to the second of the three interconnected dimensions I’ve claimed that religious conversion involves: the affective dimension. I will argue that religious conversion will likely lead to both an increase in certain emotional episodes and moods, and to a dispositional change in the affective life of the convert. An important aspect of what changes for a person in a religious conversion might be the cultivation of emotions that were previously uncultivated (for example humility, compassion, awe), as well as overcoming or managing emotions that were previously rife (for example hatred, pride, malice) both in terms of the episodes of these emotions experiences, the dispositions to experience these episodes, and in the background emotional ‘weather’ of one’s general mood. Strong emotional experiences typically form at least part of (often a significant part of) religious experiences, and empirical data on conversion suggests that times of extreme emotional turmoil precede sudden religious conversions. Here are three extracts from first-personal accounts of religious conversion that clearly include a strong affective element:

The next day I rejoiced with trembling; soon after, my happiness was so great that I said that I wanted to die; this world had no place in my affections, as I knew of, and every day appeared as solemn to me as the Sabbath. I had an ardent desire that all mankind might feel as I did; I wanted to have them all love God supremely.

Although up to that moment my soul had been filled with indescribable gloom, I felt the glorious brightness of the noonday sun shine into my heart. I felt I was a free man. Oh, the precious feeling of safety, of freedom, of resting on Jesus! I felt that Christ with all his brightness and power had come into my life; that, indeed, old things had passed away and all things had become new.

2 James, p. 188.
3 James, p. 201.
At that instant of time when I gave all up to him to do with me as he pleased, and was willing that God should rule over me at his pleasure, redeeming love broke into my soul with repeated scriptures, with such power that my whole soul seemed to be melted down with love, the burden of guilt and condemnation was gone, darkness was expelled, my heart humbled and filled with gratitude, and my whole soul, that was a few minutes ago groaning under mountains of death, and crying to an unknown God for help, was now filled with immortal love, soaring on the wings of faith, freed from the chains of death and darkness⁴

I will explore the role that these and similar emotional components play in religious conversion.

I will consider the nature of emotion in §3.1 and will discuss how the emotional responses during religious experiences lead to shifts in emotional dispositions, religious belief formation, and motivations to engage in new kinds of activity in §3.2.⁵ In §3.3 I will argue that sometimes the influence of emotions on belief formation results in self-deceptive beliefs. I will further this thread by considering the view that self-deceptive beliefs are those formed under the influence of strong emotions rather than being formed under the influence of the usual cognitive constraints, and which serve a more emotional purpose than mere epistemic inquiry. I will examine the dynamic of this ‘influence’. In §3.4 I evaluate the rationality of emotions and argue that they can contribute to cognitive processes that can be considered rational. The assumption that beliefs formed under the influence of emotion are thereby irrational is a symptom of the pervasive mind-set that emotions are inferior states to be overcome or ignored in favour of cold hard cognition. I will consider the objection that emotions are irrational and therefore cannot be a rational basis for religious conversion, and show that it does not defeat my position.

In the present chapter I conclude that emotions are not only welcome, but are essential for a rich life, and more surprisingly, that emotions are integral to our ability to behave as rational agents and therefore should be integrated into our intellectual pursuits rather than ostracised. Moreover, their role in religious conversion is indispensable, and there is a legitimate sense in which emotions can actually endow some beliefs with justification. The prospects for the justifiability of forming religious

⁴ Quoted from James, p. 215.
⁵ The latter will be elaborated more fully in Chapter 4 – The Dimension of Praxis.
beliefs on the basis of religious experience will be better given this. Whilst emotion can also lead us astray, so too can the most exalted forms of argumentation. Whereas Pascal says that ‘It is the heart which experiences God, and not the reason’⁶ I shall claim to the contrary that it is the heart which experiences God, and also the reason.

3.1. The nature of the emotions.

Before exploring the concept of emotion in more detail I will outline two distinctions. The first is between an emotion and a mood, and the distinction centres on the clarity of the intentional object. An emotion will have a fixed intentional object that it will be possible for the subject to identify (although the subject may not always actually identify it, or do so correctly). Thus if I experience the emotion of sadness, I am usually sad about something, and on reflection I am often able to identify what it is that I am sad about. A sad mood on the other hand is more vague than this and does not necessarily attach to a specifiable object. If I have a persistently depressed mood, I may not be able to specify something I am depressed about. The object might be more like ‘everything’ or ‘life in general’. Often it may be difficult to distinguish a mood from an emotion in a first-personal way, or to distinguish them by reference to a single moment, especially as it is possible that even if one is experiencing a mood, it is sometimes the case that we engage in a kind of post-hoc rationalisation when we experience feelings. This may result in us positing an intentional object for a feeling in order to make sense of the feeling to ourselves, even when there is none. For instance, anyone who has experienced (either personally or second-hand) the effects of pre-menstrual-stress may find that they posit the nearest object as the source of their irritation when in fact that ‘source’ post-dates the feeling.

There is also a distinction between an emotional episode, and an emotional disposition. If I am undergoing an emotional episode of anger this will imply that I am currently experiencing the phenomenal characteristics of anger, while if I merely have an angry disposition this doesn’t imply anything about my present state, but says of me that I perhaps easily or frequently experience angry episodes. A disposition towards a certain emotion is more like a tendency to experience emotional episodes of a particular type. We can also say that someone feels a certain emotion in a dispositional sense, when we would attribute that feeling to them but they are not

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⁶ Pascal, Pensées, 278.
currently experiencing an episode of that emotion. It can be truthfully said of me that I am angry with my boss in the dispositional sense even if I am unconscious. One can also say that someone has a disposition towards a particular mood that they frequently experience. For instance, if someone has a sad mood regularly, it would increase the aptitude of saying that they have a disposition towards sadness.

In the philosophy of emotion literature there is disagreement about what emotions are and how to understand them, and different theoretical accounts of emotion explain and account for various aspects of emotion differently. I will not attempt to decide between competing theories of emotion because my account of the role of emotion in religious conversion does not turn on how some of the subtler questions about emotion are answered. Instead, I will give a rough account based on those things that most theories agree on, focusing on the aspects of emotion that are taken as a starting point for much of the theorising.

Points of agreement are that emotions have a characteristic phenomenology – there is something that it is like to experience each emotion, and that different emotions will vary with regard to: type; intensity; valence; duration; complexity; physical manifestation; degree of consciousness; motivational capacity; and intentional object. Which emotion is present may not always be easy to identify by the individual or by others, but there are criteria for an experience counting as an experience of a particular emotion made up of a combination of those factors. Further points of agreement are that: emotions indicate subjective importance and can define our ends and priorities (by guiding our attention, and bestowing salience); emotions heighten the efficacy of memory formation and retention; emotions can guide action and provoke behavioural response; and emotions ‘play a crucial role in the regulation of social life’ and ‘have a central place in moral education and the moral life.’

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7 At any rate, attempting this would be complicated by the fact that emotions are adaptive. They have played an evolutionary role in our functioning and success as a species, and so we can expect that they will continue to evolve, and not remaining static would make abstract theorising about a diachronic relation between them and the phenomenon of religious conversion challenging at best, impossible at worst.


9 de Sousa, ‘Emotions’.

10 Ibid.
One debate that does bear on my project is whether emotions should be understood as cognitive or non-cognitive.\textsuperscript{11} The difference concerns whether emotions are reducible to either non-cognitive aspects (for instance physiological changes, like a rise in blood pressure, a dry mouth, sweaty palms, or muscle tension) or to cognitive aspects (for instance beliefs, judgements, appraisals, or intentionality – which is the of or aboutness of emotions).

A simple non-cognitive theory has been attributed to both James and Lange, in which emotions are reducible to feelings brought about by physiological changes in the body, like ‘trembling, blushing, perspiring, pangs, throbs, tingles, burning and other sensations, adrenalin secretions, increase in heart and respiratory rates, alterations of blood flow, changes in blood pressure, and digestive processes and other neurological symptoms.’\textsuperscript{12} On this model, if I see a tiger this leads to an increase in adrenaline, a tightening of certain muscles, a quickening of the breath, and an increase in sweat production. This group of feelings can be called ‘fear’ and the phenomenology of the emotion of fear is reducible to the bodily responses we can feel. Fear is therefore understood on this model as these bodily sensations. On this model the role emotions play in conversion would be no more than a symptom of something that plays a real role.

However, this model does not allow one to differentiate between all emotions. For instance, the physical symptoms just described in relation to fear might just as well be describing the effects of anger, so it is not obvious which physiological features are really different in cases of similar emotions. If the distinction cannot be found in bodily sensations then bodily sensations cannot be the whole story. This objection is made extremely plausible in light of the results of the following psychological experiment.\textsuperscript{13} Subjects were given a shot of epinephrine and placed in a room with an actor. Half of the subjects were subject to an actor instructed to behave angrily and the other half to an actor instructed to behave euphorically. The reports of these subjects tended to match their situation, with some interpreting the arousal they felt from the shot as anger and some as euphoria. If there were nothing to emotion but the bare sensation the expected result would have been a convergence in report

between all (or at the very least, most) subjects. Differentiating emotions merely by sensation becomes all the more difficult when we consider complex emotions like guilt, embarrassment, and shame. With these emotions, the object of the emotion seems crucial to understanding the emotion as an instance of that kind of emotion at all – for instance, embarrassment is not possible without reference to a person before whom one is embarrassed.

A contending group of theories leaves feelings completely behind, thus avoiding the problems faced by the James-Lange theory, instead modelling emotions on cognition. The literature displays various alternative theories of this type, that equate emotions with beliefs, judgements, appraisals, or intentionality. An objection to this kind of theory is that sometimes a person may have a contradictory belief to the proposition(s) that would need to feature in an explanation of the emotion. For example a person might believe that flying is the safest mode of transport, and yet still feel fear when flying. This is difficult to reconcile if this fear is to be understood as a belief in the truth of the proposition that flying is a threat to my safety (or similar). Another objection can be formulated in response to recent neuroscientific experiments that show that emotions arise before cognition has had the time to take place.\(^\text{14}\) If this were right, then emotion could not be equated with cognition.

Neither the cognitivist nor the non-cognitivist can account successfully for the breadth of emotional experience to be explained – the cognitivist has hold of an elephant’s trunk and the non-cognitivist has hold of its tail, and both assume that they are holding an entire animal. Moreover, both assume that the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of emotion are separable from each other.\(^\text{15}\) I think a more promising approach will integrate both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects that are prioritised by the cognitive reductionists and non-cognitivists respectively. Indeed, ‘the logic of our concepts already keeps them in a tight logical and conceptual knit.’\(^\text{16}\)

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\(^{15}\) ‘Both are following through on the program laid down by Descartes in choosing one feature among body and mind as central, and then construing the other as connected only contingently, the only result seems to be stalemate: two views unable to speak to each other from their isolated perches atop different starting points.’ Harris, p. 76.

\(^{16}\) Ibid, p. 77.
Strawson notes that ‘an objective account of reactive attitudes does not capture their importance for our lives’.\textsuperscript{17} I’ll focus on the example of one emotion to illustrate.

In order to understand the complex emotion of love, and the role it may play in religious conversion, we need to understand the concept of love and how this is manifested in the individual experiencing it. The criteria for claiming that an individual feels love will include phenomena of both the cognitive and non-cognitive kinds, and in many cases these will be inextricably linked.

The question of whether or not it is love is decided by the normal course of love, and a putative lover either meets the criteria or does not. If she says or does certain things, we say that she did not love him. These behavioral criteria define the emotion. They form part of the concept, and it is only by appeal to them that we can sensibly speak of inner events. Of course, love consists in part of a racing heart and quickening pulse, but we would have no way to talk about such inner events without their expression in behavior.\textsuperscript{18}

Love, as an emotion, involves a cognitive, a non-cognitive and a behavioural component. The cognitive component may involve beliefs about the worth and worthiness of the beloved. The non-cognitive component may include certain physical changes such as an increase in oxytocin and dopamine in the presence of the beloved. The behavioural component may involve a disposition to seek out and spend time with the beloved, look at, be affectionate with, and otherwise do things for the good of the beloved.\textsuperscript{19} These aspects combine to form a state that can be called love. Any of these by themselves in the absence of the others, we would not call love: pure bodily feelings, like throbbing or dizziness, are not emotions, and given that we can induce the chemical changes artificially even when no object is present, we would not call the affective dimension ‘love’ if it stood alone. Likewise, I can believe things about the lovableness and worthiness of an individual without actually loving them – the cognitive, or intentional aspect is essential, but not sufficient by itself. Thus both affect (feelings) and cognition are compounded in emotional experience.

\textsuperscript{17} Kimbrough, Scott, ‘Philosophy of Emotion and Ordinary Language’, \textit{Florida Philosophical Review}, Vol. VII, Iss. 1, (Summer 2007), p. 94.
\textsuperscript{18} Harris, ‘Of Somethings and Nothings – Wittgenstein on Emotion’, p. 80.
\textsuperscript{19} The details of how emotions are expressed through behaviour will be elucidated in §4.1, where I will argue that behaviour is also to be understood as involving both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects.
The cognitive aspect of emotion may be propositional in nature, although it may include non-propositional content too, as ‘there are modes of nonverbal cognitive processing and nonverbal memory’. Whatever propositional content there is need not be present in the conscious mind of the individual for the emotion to have its affect as ‘[c]onscious awareness and critical reflection are not necessary for changes in attitude, perspective, or meaning structures to take place.’ The presence of non-propositional cognitive content in the emotional experience of religious experiences would explain why religious experiences are so difficult to describe, and why people describe them in terms readily at hand from the religious tradition with which they are most familiar. Trying to explain a feeling using words is akin to trying to describe a picture using words. It may not include anything inaccurate, and it may indicate the main layout of the scene, elaborating on relevant details, but no description will be an adequate substitute for having a feeling any more than for surveying a picture with your own eyes.

3.2. The interplay between emotions and beliefs.

Having explored the doxastic dimension in the previous chapter, I can consider the interplay between this and the affective dimension currently under consideration. In §1.1.2 I argued that there is a useful analogy between scientific paradigms and religious conversion. The current focus on emotions can further this analogy, as the way that emotions direct our attention to provide a source of reasons is similar to the way that scientific paradigms stimulate research. James notes that ‘[e]motion, especially violent ones, are extremely potent in precipitating mental rearrangements’. They can do this, in part, by influencing belief formation, so that the emotional landscape of an individual will affect the beliefs that they form.

An important way in which emotions affect belief formation is that they direct our attention and alter the salience of the objects of emotion. When we consider some

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21 Ibid.
22 ‘paying attention to certain things [as we do when our emotions are engaged] is a source of reasons, but comes before them. Similarly, scientific paradigms, in Kuhn’s sense, are better at stimulating research that at finding compelling and fair reasons for their own adoption’ Ronald de Sousa, ‘The Rationality of Emotions’, in Rorty, Amelie, (eds.), Explaining Emotions, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, (1980), p. 139.
23 James, p. 196.
religious symbol, text, or artefact, ‘when our attention is roused, then the more steadily we dwell upon it, the more probable does it seem that a revelation has been or will be given to us.’\textsuperscript{24} If one has a sufficiently strong emotional response, (for instance the overwhelming and extreme kind that often features in religious experiences) this is very likely to lead to the perception of extreme importance regarding the object of experience. This importance will have a residual effect that will continue to direct attention. Although much is yet to be understood, a broad outline of the functions of the brain claims that the Reticular Activating System (RAS) acts as an intermediary between the lower and higher brain functions and input from the former can influence the latter. More specifically, emotional or instinctive input can end up affecting reasoning and rational thinking, via the RAS, as the emotional cues direct our attention which influences reasoning and thinking. The RAS (among many other functions) filters out unimportant aspects of our surroundings and puts us into a state of attention with regards to others. It is why we are more drawn to people over objects, moving objects over still ones, and emotionally significant objects and people over emotionally neutral ones.

In a religious experience the emotional component will lead to an increase in attention and engagement with anything that resembles, reminds one of, or seems even remotely relevant to that experience. Thus, if the experience was of God, this may lead to the subject of the experience noticing places of worship they may previously have walked past, being interested in taking part in discussions about God, attaching more significance to anything they read about him, and generally being more open to, and engaged with anything that is included in the sphere of increased salience thereafter. The assignment of increased salience to religious propositions will make it more likely that new religious beliefs will form, in virtue of the fact that it makes it much more likely that a person will engage with religious people, behaviours, arguments, and other things which may all contribute to the formation of religious beliefs.\textsuperscript{25}

If this is right, this may explain why two people exposed to the same evidence may form different beliefs. This would be a particularly interesting result in the


\textsuperscript{25} To revisit an earlier concern in §2.3 about the fact that arguments perceived as sound are still unconvincing to subjects, perhaps the inability of pure cold argument to convince subjects to the extent required to lead to beliefs and action may explicable in terms of the lack of emotional engagement, and so in turn, the lack of motivation and salience required for this.
present context, for it may explain why some individuals convert while others do not, even when they have been exposed to the same evidence. For instance, my brother and sister are only a year apart in age, have the same parents, education, and upbringing, and are in many respects outwardly similar – yet my brother did not convert in response to what was largely the same set of external stimuli.

There is also a question concerning how a transient experience could bring about the long lasting and extensive changes that occur in religious conversions. Having an emotional episode now can contribute to an explanation of how beliefs are formed, but beliefs are sometimes retained even once the emotional episode passes. Beyond the short-term influence of emotions on initial belief formation, there is also an effect on belief retention, and this far outlives the transient experience of an emotional episode. Wynn discusses this in relation to religious experiences, saying that:

such moments of vividly experienced feeling are typically transient (we cannot, realistically, live enduringly in such a state of heightened sensitivity). Even allowing that we continue to acknowledge the authority of the original experience once the feeling has subsided, there is a question therefore about how we are to appropriate its meaning at later times, and appropriate that meaning ‘really’ and not just ‘notionally’.

One way we can reconcile the longevity of the effects with the transience of the experience is by reference to emotional dispositions. Emotional dispositions are changeable, and interact with experiences in that experiences can consolidate, attenuate, form, or completely obliterate a disposition. For example, I might have a pleasant experience of clowns, and through repeated good experience I build a disposition of fond feelings towards clowns in general. I will then be predisposed to react favourably when I encounter clowns in the future. Even if a pattern is well entrenched, a single event (if significant enough) can uproot a disposition, for example, one need only be traumatised by one clown to form a fearful disposition thereafter. This is an interesting result because it can partly explain (in cases involving emotional experiences) how and why religious conversions do often involve a change

26 Wynn, Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding, p. 71.
in disposition. The dispositional changes tend to be towards emotions that might be considered ‘religious’ (like humility, compassion, awe, and suchlike), and away from those that might be considered vicious (such as pride, hatred, greed, and suchlike). One may have an experience in which one feels so humbled, for example, that this forms a new disposition to feel more humble and attenuates the disposition towards pride. As these dispositions will persist until some other influence alters them, they can continue to have an impact long after the experience itself has ended. We should also note here, that some emotions can be understood, not as states that occur at moments, but as processes that perdure. Emotions ‘may have a part to play in giving or recognising structure and meaning in human life.’ The process can form a recognisable pattern, as in the case of grief, which involves different aspects that can occur in stages. Wittgenstein says that ‘“Grief” describes a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life’. According to Goldie, ‘[t]he pattern has certain features. It includes characteristic thoughts, judgments, feelings, imaginings, actions, expressive actions, habitual actions, and much else besides, unfolding over time, but none of which is essential at any particular time.’ Thus an emotional experience is itself extended in time and can thus continue to influence that to which it is connected (like beliefs and motivations to act).

Another way we can reconcile the longevity of the effects with the transience of the experience is that once a new belief is formed, this will in turn influence the behaviour one adopts, the way that new experiences are framed, or understood, and the way that one feels about future experiences. Once these behaviours are adopted, and once new experiences start to be framed differently, it becomes progressively unlikely that the belief will be rejected, and increasingly likely that consistent beliefs will be formed in favour of inconsistent ones in future. The fallacy of confirmation bias may play a role here, which is a well-documented effect whereby we are more likely to interpret new evidence and integrate it into our current framework in such a way as to confirm our pre-existing beliefs than we are to challenge those beliefs. Once a new belief is formed, future experiences are more likely to be fitted into the existing belief framework and thus interpreted as confirming the belief, than if that

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31 Kahneman, p. 80-81.
belief had never formed. According to Starkey ‘emotions can generate or play a key role in supporting confirmation bias by controlling the way that we apprehend situations, and encouraging us to focus on particular evidence.’\textsuperscript{32} For instance, once my sister believes that people can be taken over by the Holy Spirit, witnessing someone in church shaking and speaking in tongues is more likely to be taken as confirmation of the claim that people can be infused by the Holy Spirit by her than by my brother. For him, this same observation may instead confirm his belief that religious people act in strange ways.

One further way that emotions have a residual affect is through that fact that people often have improved memory formation and retention when they are emotionally aroused.\textsuperscript{33} Research indicates that when subjects are emotionally stimulated so that the amygdala is activated, hormones are released ‘that consolidate into long-term memories whatever is experienced at the time. That is, after a delay of several days, information that has been followed by such emotional or physiological arousal tends to be well recalled.’\textsuperscript{34} What is remembered in this way can also be recalled with more detail than what is recalled from unemotional events. This can explain the ability for religious experiences that are highly emotional to remain more prominent in the mental field than mundane experiences. The role of emotions in conversion acts as a way of re-orienting the mind. While it is unlikely that you remember what you had for dinner this day one month ago, you are exceedingly more likely to remember if someone dear to you surprised you with a special dinner, arousing many positive feelings. Religious experiences are able to reside for a long time in part because of the emotional component gives the experience a greater prominence for a longer duration in a person’s Jamsian mental field.

As well as influencing beliefs, emotions can also alter the significance of a particular belief that already existed prior to the emotional episode, and can influence the connections that are deemed to exist between beliefs. For instance, via the bestowal of emotional significance to a belief, it can come to the forefront of one’s mental field while others will subside into the peripheral reaches of consciousness. So a previously insignificant belief can gain importance and may thus organise one’s

\textsuperscript{33} ‘Improved’ here does not mean ‘more accurate’.
worldview in such a way as for that belief to be what might be called an ‘organising belief’. To return to the analogy with scientific revolutions, an organising belief would be a belief on which a paradigm rests, and which would be taken to be of primary importance, so that other beliefs would be organised in relation to it. Once a belief has gained prominence, it will also come more readily to mind, and will be more easily accessible in a greater variety of contexts to the mental field. This in turn will affect the connections it may have to a greater variety of other beliefs, and it will achieve a greater network of related beliefs and cognitions. The availability bias is a phenomenon whereby we may reach different (often faulty) conclusions, based on how quickly or readily information comes to mind. For instance, if we read a news story about someone being hit by lightning five days in a row, but no news stories about car traffic accidents we will be likely to overestimate the overall number of people who die in lightning storms relative to car traffic accidents, but the estimate bears less relation to the actual occurrence of these incidents than to the ease with which they come to mind.\(^\text{35}\)

The interaction between beliefs and emotions is reflexive. Aside from the aforementioned ways that beliefs are influenced by emotion, emotions are also influenced by beliefs. That emotions arise in response to beliefs is a foundational premise of cognitive behavioural therapy, where the approach taken to managing difficult emotions is to identify and correct the beliefs from which they arise. There is a first-order connection in that one’s beliefs about a situation will affect the emotional response in that situation. For instance, if one believes a snake is poisonous, one may feel fear, whereas if one believes a snake is harmless yet rare it may provoke curiosity. There is also a second-order connection in that one may have feelings about one’s beliefs. For instance, I may believe that my friend has stolen from me and feel disappointed that I believe it.

I have shown in this section how emotions contribute to religious beliefs and play a role in religious conversion. The interaction between emotions and belief might be seen metaphorically as a spiralling interaction, whereby taking either emotion or belief as a starting point, a belief can cause an emotion which can in turn cause a further belief, which can give rise to a further emotion, and so on.\(^\text{36}\) The affectively coloured account of religious conversion that we now have may seem to be an

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\(^{35}\) Kahnman, p 131.

\(^{36}\) In §5.1 we will see how behaviour is also part of this spiral.
improvement on the emotionless picture of religious experience painted in Chapter Two. However this can only count as an improvement if the influence of the emotions is of the right type – if the emotions merely distort or cloud, then their involvement cannot count as an advantage. In the next section I will consider cases in which the influence of emotions is detrimental to the belief formation process, namely, where emotional influence leads to the formation of self-deceptive beliefs.

3.3. The nature of self-deception.

In this section I argue that the emotions play a role in the explanation of self-deceptive beliefs. Given that emotions play a role in conversion, if the emotions also affect the formation of religious beliefs in such a way as to lead to self-deceptive beliefs, this would diminish the value of those beliefs. Wynn acknowledges that

if I come to realise that my exalted, religiously informed affective state is the product of my desire for it, whether for narcissistic or dramaturgical reasons, then that state can hardly confer any religious consolation. On the contrary, in that case, I might well think that my spiritual life is pretty worthless, since it turns out to involve a kind of wish fulfilment rather than any genuine encounter with God. […] how can we be sure that a particular candidate for this title is free from the influence of dramaturgical or narcissistic motives? And if we can’t be sure, doesn’t that suggest that we can’t after all rely very much upon affectively constituted kinds of insight.37

Self-deceptive beliefs are a sub-class of beliefs that are formed on insufficient evidence. Due to the gap between belief and evidence, self-deceptive beliefs are not justifiable on the discussed grounds for epistemic justification. In the literature there are two kinds of account of self-deception: intentionalist accounts, and non-intentionalist accounts. I will discuss these in turn, and will conclude that non-intentionalist accounts, which gives emotion a central role, are preferable as an explanation of how self-deception should be understood. I will also argue that despite the potential for deviation or error, emotions can nevertheless be considered rational under suitable circumstances and so the role that they play is not undermined by the capacity to influence belief formation.

37 Wynn, Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding, pp. 182-3.
Intentionalist accounts of self-deception model it on interpersonal deception, whereby someone leads a person to believe that P while themselves believing that not-P. Carrying over the analogy, this model would have it that a person self-deceives when, although they realise that not-P, they intend to bring about the belief that P, and then do so.\(^{38}\) Davidson understands self-deception as a case in which A has evidence that P and thinks it more likely to be true than not-P, but where A forms the intention to act in such a way as to cause himself to believe that not-P. \(^{39}\) On this view ‘The self-deceiver must intend the “deception”’.\(^{40}\) The intention to form the belief is not seen to be sufficient for self-deception, as the belief must actually be formed in order for there to be a belief that can count as self-deceptive. Williams says that armed with such an intention one may ‘set out to use the machinery of drugs, hypnotism, or whatever to bring it about’.\(^{41}\) Any resulting belief would count as self-deceptive on the intentionalist account.

However, this way of thinking about self-deception is highly problematic. For one to hold the belief that P sincerely, it would seem to be a requirement that one does not know that P is the result of self-deception, for of course, at the moment one acknowledges that their belief was formed self-deceptively, they are no longer self-deceiving. This basic inconsistency challenges the intentional view of self-deception in that one must simultaneously intend to believe that not-P whilst believing P, and then come to sincerely believe that not-P, which is at best irrational, and at worst paradoxical. One might be tempted to bite this bullet. For of course, we acknowledged in §2.1 that people can and do hold contradictory beliefs, and can be irrational. There is nothing intrinsically impossible about holding contradictory beliefs, and we do fall prey to this inconsistency on a regular basis.

It is the nature of the contradictory beliefs posited by the intentionalist that is puzzling. One assumes that in ordinary cases of contradictory beliefs, the problem arises as a result of error, negligence, or inattention. Once we become aware that we hold contradictory beliefs, we normally acknowledge that one or the other has to go, and would then proceed to re-evaluate our beliefs. On the contrary, in cases of self-

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\(^{38}\) The possibility of some kind of self-deception is relevant to the discussion about the voluntariness of beliefs. If one could decide to believe something out of sheer desire to do so and then successfully form that belief on this basis, this would be a counterexample to doxastic involuntarism.


\(^{40}\) Ibid, pp. 79-92.

\(^{41}\) Williams, ‘Deciding to believe’, p. 150.
deception (according to the intentionalist) a person *deliberately* and *knowingly* forms a contradictory belief. When drawing on our own experience of having self-deceptive beliefs, we must choose an example that has passed, as by its nature self-deceptive beliefs can only be interpreted retrospectively. We could only recognise self-deceptive beliefs as such after we have released ourselves from their hold. If you search for an example in your own history of self-deceptive beliefs, does something in that experience correspond to the deliberate attempt to form a belief that runs counter to your current evidence and belief? If not, what could account for this, if not that this is an incorrect account of self-deception?

This ‘intentionalist’ view seems to work under a mistaken assumption. We have certain stimuli, for example perception of a chair, and we respond to it, for example by forming a belief that there is a chair. Alternatively, the stimulus might be the intention to form a belief, and the response might be to form that belief. The intentionalist mistakenly allows for only two options for what might occur *between* stimulus and response in the belief formation process: simply interpreting the stimulus and forming a belief that is most in line with the stimulus, as in most ordinary cases, or making a decision to have a certain response which more or less diverges from the most rational response that the stimulus would warrant, as in the case of self-deception. However, this cognitive process does not involve a direct correlation between the stimulus and a specific response. Instead, there can be various other factors that determine, for a given stimulus, what the response will be.

To illustrate, take Clifford’s ship-owner, who self-deceptively forms the belief that his ship is sea-worthy despite some obvious faults. If this ship owner perceives various faults, some wear-and-tear, and the age and condition of the ship overall, and his cognitive faculties were in working order without any self-deception, he would respond to this stimulus by forming the belief that the ship needs to be refurbished, and that it would be a high risk venture to send it out to sea. Not everyone would form the same belief in response to these stimuli, because there are other factors affecting the response other than the reception of the perceptual data. For example, another ship-owner (or the same ship-owner on a different occasion) may be tired and drunk, and may also fail to conclude that the ship is unsafe because he fails to follow through his line of reasoning correctly, which may be called negligence.\(^2\) A butcher or baker

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\(^2\) This example is intended to illustrate a distinction between self-deception and mere error.
may also look upon the same ship and as shipping is not their trade, they don’t have
the same pre-existing beliefs about the function of ships, and through their ignorance
they have no reason to conclude that the ship is unsafe. The intentionalist account has
it that when the ship owner self-deceives, this is neither negligence nor ignorance, as
he in some way acknowledges that the ship is unsafe, but for reasons of self-interest
actually decides to ignore that, and instead deliberately forms the belief that it is safe.

A better way of thinking about self-deception takes account of the additional
influences, and is suggested by folk-psychological ways of understanding instances of
self-deception. This way is the non-intentionalist account, and Amesbury’s illustration
makes the difference apparent: rather than believing that the ship is unsafe and then
intending to form the opposite belief ‘the ship owner would respond that he has
examined the evidence. What he doesn’t know - and what we do - is that his reading
of the evidence is skewed by his self-interest and greed. These blinders are, however,
invisible to him, and so it is with a clear conscience and a "light heart" that he
watches his dilapidated vessel disappear over the horizon.’\textsuperscript{43} Here the emphasis is on
motivations that affect his cognitive process in relation to the evidence. He is driven
to neglect certain facts and to draw his attention to the meagre evidence in support of
his favoured conclusion (for example that the ship has sailed successfully in the past)
by his self-interest and greed – not by a deliberate intention to do so in order to form a
certain belief. It is the influence of emotions (in this case greed) acting on the ship-
owner that guides his attention away from the evidence that doesn’t serve his purpose,
and places undue salience on those that do. Self-deception most often occurs in
situations where the truth of \( P \) has emotional consequences for the subject, and where
there are some emotional motivations for adopting the belief that \( P \).

So far the discussion of belief has focused on what we might call ‘bottom-up’
belief formation, where some outside trigger starts off a cognitive process, the end
result of which is the formation of a belief about some aspect relevant to that trigger.
However, the current discussion of emotion makes it clear that we should also
consider ‘top-down’ belief formation. This is where our expectations, emotions, and
other factors can influence beliefs to form that even conflict with the evidence
provided by the stimulus. Here is a simple example: glance at the phrase in the
triangle (fig. 1) in order to see what it says.

\textsuperscript{43} Amesbury, ‘The Virtues of Belief – Towards a Non-Evidentialist Ethics of Belief-Formation’, p. 34.
Bottom-up processing involves noticing what the phrase actually says based on your perception of the letters on the page. If this is the process you just experienced, you will have noticed the repetition of the word ‘the’. It might be that you did not notice the error at first – many people do not. Perhaps you did a double take or stumbled over it, in which case you did employ bottom-up processing but not as a primary mechanism. When we read the sentence in such a way as to miss (even temporarily) the mistake, it is an example of top-down processing: the expectation of what it says that is bred from familiarity with the well-known phrase influences your belief about what it says. This effect is stronger when the expectation is stronger, and when less attention is paid. This fact accounts for why you are less apt to picking up on your own typing errors than the errors of others (where the expectation effect is weaker due to unfamiliarity with the text) and (arguably) why more religious experiences occur at revivals and other religious meetings where one is primed for having such an experience and has a higher expectation that such an experience may occur, than in mundane circumstances. Given that beliefs formed are subject to the influence of other processes which guide our attention and bestow salience, and given that we have argued that emotions do these very things, it becomes pertinent to question the role of emotions in this process.

Emotions affect information processing skills of various kinds: they are associated with less systematic thinking, less efficient processing skills, reliance on simplistic response strategies, decreased reliance on direct evidence, and increased reliance on superficial cues. In addition, emotions affect attention and salience patterns, as well as working memory capacity. There is evidence that belief formation under the influence of an emotion is strongly affected by selective features of the environment.
and is removed from systematic reasoning. This is so because, in addition to causing considerable reliance on superficial cues, emotions affect the salience level of environmental features: what is more easily observable and stands out in one's environment as well as in one's memory is highly sensitive to the subject's emotional state. Furthermore, emotional arousal causes superficial consideration of the evidence. It is all the more easy to form a distorted view of the evidence in the absence of careful consideration.\footnote{Lazar, D., ‘Deceiving Oneself or Self-Deceived? On the Formation of Beliefs “Under the Influence”’, \textit{Mind}, Vol. 108, No. 430, (Apr., 1999), p. 280.}

It bestows reasonableness on the non-intentionalist’s claims about the effect of emotion on belief.

To summarise, on the non-intentionalist account, a belief is self-deceptive where (a) one possesses evidence that \( p \), and (b) one holds a false belief that \( \neg p \), and (c) one has a desire or emotion that explains why \( p \) is believed rather than \( \neg p \).\footnote{Dewese-Boyd, Ian, ‘Self-Deception’, \textit{The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy}, (Spring 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/self-deception/>.} For example, Alice has a fear of her house being burgled, pertinent due to a recent burglary and a police officer’s warning that the criminals may return. She may form the false belief that she forgot to dead bolt the front door. She has good evidence that this is not the case, for instance her friend’s insistence that she did, and the fact that she has never previously neglected it. Where the emotional interference is a strong motivation for forming the false belief, the belief would count as self-deceptive. Note that ‘cognitive shifts that are produced by emotions, occur in the absence of changes in relevant information: the subject “puts together” the evidence in a different way when her mood shifts.’\footnote{Lazar, p. 281.} Thus Alice may leave her house believing that she has taken the necessary precautions and only later believe that she has left the door unbolted, despite no new evidence coming to light. In a similar fashion, a fear of death might bring about a belief in an afterlife, ennui may bring about belief in a higher purpose, and in these cases too, if these beliefs form not in response to some new and compelling evidence, but in response to an emotional shift, the beliefs would count as self-deceptive.

Given that some religious beliefs are formed under the influence of strong emotions, especially those formed during highly emotional religious experiences,
some religious beliefs will be self-deceptive. The epistemic status of self-deceptive beliefs depends in such cases on the evaluation that we give to the epistemic value of the emotions that these beliefs are based upon. That is, if emotions have either no epistemic value, or a negative one (for example they are irrational) then the beliefs formed under the influence of these emotions will likewise have no, or negative, epistemic value. In the next section I will discuss the appropriateness of emotions and the bearing this has on the rationality of emotions. I will defend the view that, contrary to the claim that the emotions are an impediment to rationality, they are integrally important to our rationality and can therefore be (at the least) legitimately useful to our rational thought.

3.4. The rationality of emotion.

Having argued that emotions guide cognitive processes, including those that lead to belief formation, and that some of these occasions will count as self-deceptive, I now turn to the question of whether the influence that emotions have can count as rational. The term ‘rational’ is used to label anything that accords with the principles of reason (however they are construed) and anything that falls short of, or contravenes these principles is therefore deficient, and the term ‘irrational’ is often used as a derogatory term. Things that it makes no sense to evaluate in terms of rationality are ‘nonrational’. The emotions have been claimed to be irrational by some, and to be nonrational by others, and I will be taking the third position, that they can be rational, although first I will outline a more fine-grained distinction between ways of being ‘rational’.

We can distinguish between types of rationality, or ways of being rational. In §2.4 I said that rationality was related to justification, in that if a belief is justified then it is rational to hold it. Here, I will claim that if an emotion is justified, then it is rational. I also claimed that justification is divisible into types: moral justification; epistemic justification; and pragmatic justification. An emotion being justified in these different ways may allow us to make distinctions between the ways that the emotion would count as rational.

Insofar as emotions involve beliefs, they will be subject to epistemic standards of justification. If Fred is angry because he believes that Bob has tried to sabotage him, his anger would be unjustified should his belief turn out to be false, or if it were
true for a reason unconnected with his reason for holding it a suitable way. There needs to be cohesion between one’s emotions and beliefs in order to maintain integrity. Where there is a tension between one’s feelings and one’s beliefs there will be dissonance, and a lack of integrity.

When we say that Fred is morally justified in his anger, we often mean something like his anger is *appropriate* given the stimulus. This may depend on whether my feeling is in line with, in terms of its intensity and duration, the situation that it arose from. For instance, Fred’s anger might be inappropriate if the object of anger had actually done nothing wrong, or if the anger was extreme, or prolonged. This is not to say that the emotion is morally wrong, simply unjustified. There is every chance in cases where people exhibit disproportionate emotional reactions to situations that they are in part actually reacting to an entirely different event or situation and the current one is simply a trigger, onto which the emotion has been inappropriately displaced, or transferred. Fred’s anger might be justified whenever the object of anger gave sufficient reason for the angry response and the response was well-measured. Thus here there is an appropriate connection between the world and the emotional response. The sense in which we might consider the emotion to be *justified* in this case might be a moral sense. On a roughly Aristotelian model we could interpret the right emotional response to be one that embodies a mean between extremes, and is in line with the situation in the ways outlined.

An emotion may be pragmatically justified when it helps one to achieve a given end, or when it contributes to the best outcome in a given situation. There will be many cases in which heuristic, associative, or automatic processing may be more appropriate and beneficial than systematic, rule-based, or controlled processing, despite the fact that the latter is typically equated with rationality. For instance, emotions can heighten our ability to focus appropriately. Emotions can sometimes also help to resolve a given situation effectively in various ways. For example, a display of the emotion of guilt can reassure others that we have learnt from our mistakes, or a display of humility can de-escalate a situation involving conflict. Emotions also prime our bodies for appropriate action. For instance, fear can prepare

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47 Whatever that way turns out to be, which will depend on which theory of knowledge one holds.
49 Clore suggests that instead of focusing on the terms ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ we can instead look at different processes which pair up to form alternative kinds of thinking which don’t retain the value laden implications of the catchalls. These include “‘controlled vs. automatic processing,” “systematic vs. heuristic processing,” or “rule based vs. associative processing.”” Clore, p. 325.
our body for a fight or flight response, which pragmatically speaking can help us to survive. Pragmatic considerations also come into play on occasions on which it would be *irrational* to think something through too much – we would be better off reacting immediately.\textsuperscript{50} Controlled processing might give us a lower margin for error in any decision that we make, but will take a lot more time and effort than automatic processing, which will be unacceptable where instant action is required.

Supporting the thought that heuristic, associative, or automatic processing can be pragmatically justified is the conclusion of an experiment conducted on people through a long period in their lives, which showed that:

those who engaged in heuristic thinking were also the most healthy, happy, and successful. The group that answered correctly by second-guessing their own inclinations consisted of individuals found to engage in self-doubt, harbor neurotic beliefs, and fare less well in life generally. The results suggest that being strictly ‘rational’ (according to our initial definition) may not always be the preferred mode of thought. Engaging in heuristic thinking, although it occasionally leads to error, tends to be adaptive, rather than undesirable. How could this be? The answer is simply that conscious, deliberative, logical thought is metabolically expensive.\textsuperscript{51}

When conserving energy and resources is a priority then, engaging in what might be called ‘irrational’ thinking, may actually be the most pragmatically rational thing to do.

In the remainder of this section I will offer some good reasons for thinking that emotions can be rational. Emotions are uniquely beneficial to our cognitive lives, and I will claim that these benefits show that emotions are valuable to our successful cognition. I’ll then consider some reasons that emotions are taken to be irrational, by way of objection. The typical implication of such views is that emotions should be suppressed, or avoided. I will argue that these objections are unsuccessful. The result of this conclusion for religious conversion is that even if religious conversions involve an emotional shift, or if the beliefs formed in religious conversion are emotionally driven, they are not necessarily irrational as a result. This leaves open the possibility of a healthy and well-functioning role for emotions in our cognition and for

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid, p. 327-8.
integration between the various aspects of religious conversion I discuss.

Self-deceptive beliefs have a particularly bad press. However, adaptively speaking, it is more useful to us to form some self-deceptive beliefs than only forming beliefs that are not self-deceptive. For example, ‘deceiv[ing] oneself into thinking that one is sure of something when one is not’ may be a huge aide to practical reasoning in cases where one has to act. We are all motivated to reach a state of integrated consistency between our beliefs, actions, and feelings, and the role that the emotions play in this actually drive us towards rational beliefs and actions, and thus can themselves be evaluated in terms of rationality.

One advantage of the emotions becomes clear if we remember that we also have emotional reactions to things we perceive to be rational and irrational, as ‘[w]hen we hear others being illogical, we are critical of them and find their assertions unpersuasive. And when we hear ourselves being illogical or inconsistent, we become embarrassed and motivated to rethink our position. Thus, perhaps surprisingly, emotion actually enforces standards of reason.’ We can be driven towards logical and rational conclusions and away from the contrary by the experience of pleasant and unpleasant emotions respectively. Whenever we experience a lack of integration or an inconsistency between various aspects of our selves, including our beliefs, behaviour, and feelings, we experience what is called ‘cognitive dissonance’. This is a kind of stress reaction and is distressing. This distress is unpleasant and so is usually a motivator to reduce the dissonance in some way:

the automatic, negative affective reaction we have to incoherence and illogic motivates rational thought. The fact that people care deeply about the logic and consistency of their own beliefs and actions can be seen in the classic social psychological phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. Relevant research showed that when people act in ways that are inconsistent with their beliefs, a state of tension or cognitive dissonance is generated, which motivates them to adjust their beliefs to make them consistent with their actions—the process of dissonance reduction.

For instance, I believe in the benefits of charitable giving. Then I walk past a charity fundraiser without making a donation. At this moment I am aware that my actions are

54 Ibid.
inconsistent with this belief, and I experience a negative emotion as a result, which motivates me to resolve this dissonance. Resolution may take different forms. I may change my behaviour, (turn around and donate to the fundraiser or go out of my way on the next opportunity to give to charity), re-evaluate my beliefs (for instance about the benefits of giving or about the worth of giving to this particular charity), or I may self-deceive or rationalise my behaviour (ignoring or denying the event, or making excuses like that I was too busy).

There is a sense in which emotions can be seen as rational because of the ways that they enable our other rational faculties to operate effectively. At any given moment, there are innumerable aspects of our environment that could all be the focus of our attention but which cannot all be processed: we are confronted with a cacophony of stimuli. To rationally process the field of awareness and think through which aspects of our environment are most pertinent, relevant, interesting, or otherwise deserving of attention, would be very time consuming and would be a huge metabolic expense. In §1.1.1 I noted how conversion involves shifts in one’s mental field, and changes in salience patterns. Now we can begin to see that our emotions partly explain why: when we experience different emotions, the pertinent aspects of our environments will also change, as ‘[t]he emotions […] constitute patterns of salience, lighting up some matters as deserving of our attention and leaving others at the periphery of our awareness.’

If we needed to weigh up all of the input on the savannah before reacting to a tiger, we would be dead before achieving action. Instead, the emotions ‘play an active role in the dynamics of attention, serving to make us focus on a narrower range of objects and to maintain that focus.’ In general we pay more attention to the objects of emotion than to other objects and in this way ‘[e]motions play a crucial role in determining what is salient, and in keeping each person motivated to address what is important for him or her.’

When I feel an emotional reaction to religious icons, I will notice and engage with them over other aspects of my surroundings. If I were feeling differently, I might notice other aspects of the same environment. Wynn explains that:

55 Wynn, Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding, p. 104.
56 Starkey, p. 435.
To register some feature of a situation emotionally is to accord that feature weight, or to judge it to have some sort of importance. So the objects of the emotions are already lit up for us as deserving of attention, and in that case, we seem to have good prima facie reason for allowing our emotions, especially strongly felt emotions, to set the agenda for our thinking.\textsuperscript{58}

Thus, our reliance on emotions provide an efficient short cut which allows us to respond in ways that most benefit us – ignoring our emotions would therefore be irrational. If what Wynn says is right, then the emotions set up the possibility of further rational thought to occur about the salient subject or object.

Damasio’s research provides empirical support for the view that emotions are vital for rationality.\textsuperscript{59} His subjects were previously ordinary people who sustained injuries to the prefrontal and somatosensory cortices of the brain, which meant that they were unable to experience emotions. He describes a therapy session with one such patient, during which he asked the patient when would be a good time for their next appointment. The answer he gave detailed extensive reasons for and against the various options, and twenty minutes later the patient was still enumerating relevant facts with no decision forthcoming. This inability to form a decision can be accounted for by the absence of the emotions in the following way. Without emotions adding salience to some reasons and not others, the patient was less able to distinguish quickly between the important and the trivial factors affecting the decision. Without the spotlight of emotion to act as a shortcut to the most pertinent information, everything relevant had to be trotted out and rationally compared to determine what should be done. Without the feeling of discomfort one may get in social situations, he was also unaware of the inappropriateness of his ramblings. The impetus to close it short even in the absence of decisive facts was thus also missing. This picture of the connection between emotion and rationality is that:

feelings may offer a ‘quick and dirty’ (non-conceptually articulated) route to choices of action. It also recalls Goldie’s suggestion that the action-guiding understanding that is embedded in feeling may not be reducible to anything we have articulated (or could articulate) in verbal terms. For somatic markers are not themselves

\textsuperscript{58} Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding*, p. 103.

\textsuperscript{59} António Damásio, in conversation with David Brooks, (July 4 2009), Aspen Ideas Festival, Aspen, CO. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wup_K2WN0I.
propositionally articulated thoughts, but they move us to action anyway, in ways that
involve some genuine taking stock of what is at stake in a situation.\textsuperscript{60}

In Chapter Four – The Dimension of Praxis I will further examine the role of action in
religious conversion.

Another rational benefit of emotions occurs as a result of the fact that even
simulating or imagining a possible state of affairs will engender an emotional
reaction. We have emotional reactions to the mere thought or imagining of some
possible future state of affairs. This can give us insight into whether the consequences
or likely consequences of certain things will be good or bad. ‘When contemplating
such actions in the future, twinges of anticipated affect can then alter our choices to
maximize positive outcomes.’\textsuperscript{61} By feeling a certain way when we consider a possible
course of action, we can navigate our decisions to effectively avoid negative
outcomes and improve the prevalence of positive ones.

An interesting application of this thought is that emotions can play the role of
‘moral guide’. When we feel shame, disgust, or guilt in relation to some action, we
are motivated to act so as to reduce these feelings. In a normally functioning
individual we would expect that these feelings typically arise in response to acts we
would call immoral. We are motivated to act morally by emotions such as love,
compassion, and those we experience via empathy with another’s emotions. Religious
conversion involves a shift in the emotional landscape, both in terms of the
dispositions to feel certain emotions and in the emotions that are felt in response to
certain stimuli. Therefore, religious conversion also involves moral change, insofar as
the emotional change leads to different morally evaluable behaviour. I’ll come to a
more general conclusion than this in §5.4, where I’ll be in a position to argue that
religious conversion involves moral change in virtue of the fact that emotions (as well
as beliefs and action) have their own ethics, and that emotions contribute to virtue not
only insofar as they affect behaviour (which is a clearer bearer of normativity) but that
as ‘both judgement and action lack the emotionality that is a requirement of virtue’\textsuperscript{62}
emotions are a necessary aspect of a moral life.

Lastly, emotions give us information about and access to our body, our values,

\textsuperscript{60} Wynn, \textit{Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding}, p. 116.
\textsuperscript{61} Clore, p. 330.
our health, and other aspects of ourselves:

The tendency to ignore our emotions is oldthink, a remnant of the still reigning paradigm that keeps us focused on the material level of health, the physicality of it. But the emotions are key elements in self-care because they allow us to enter into the bodymind’s conversation. By getting in touch with emotions, both by listening to them and by directing them through the psychosomatic network, we gain access to the healing wisdom that is everyone’s natural biological right.63

The information we get from noticing the occurrence of emotions contributes both to the beliefs that we form, and the behaviour that we adopt, and the information itself allows for new states of knowledge to be reached that may not have been possible without it.64

Having given some compelling reasons for the rationality of emotions, I now consider the contrary view. Emotions can be irrational by leading us to form irrational beliefs, or by motivating us to perform irrational actions, in any of the relevant senses. One reason for thinking that emotions are irrational stems directly from the previous discussion of self-deception. This sets the stage for a view in which the emotions are antagonistic to reason,65 and that they should be avoided.66 Not all self-deceptive beliefs serve a useful purpose. For example, Daniel may form the self-deceptive belief that Amy is having an affair, motivated by his jealousy and fear, despite a lack of evidence for this. If this belief motivates possessive, suspicious, accusatory, insecure, or other unpleasant behaviour, it is more likely to bring it about the destruction of the relationship he is aiming to protect than if his beliefs were in line with the evidence. If Amy is faithful, his emotion is inappropriate. However, the fact that we can have inappropriate emotions, does not show that all emotions are inappropriate, and so does not show that emotions cannot be rational – only that they are sometimes not. It is correct that emotions leading to pathological or self-deceptive beliefs will (often) be irrational, but so far this doesn’t show that the influence of emotion is always irrational, or irrational per se. This is analogous to an argument that says that because people’s rational thinking is sometimes erroneous, rational thinking should be

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64 This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
65 ‘[Emotions are] reputed to be antagonists of rationality’. de Sousa, ‘Emotions’.
66 ‘We regularly engage a limited strategy of this sort (consider counting to ten, and then rethinking a situation).’ Starkey, p. 451.
abandoned as a tool. Therefore the fact that some emotions are inappropriate and leads to negative outcomes, is not a reason to conclude that emotions in general are irrational.

We could take this possibility to an extreme, and consider cases where the emotional affect is so extreme for an individual that rational behaviour or thought is no longer possible for them. When taken to an extreme, emotional distress in individuals can ‘actually block them from deliberating about their futures, thus derailing their decision making capacity.’ Halpern claims that sometimes emotional influence might render beliefs unrealistic by involving subjective bias and distortion, however without making them unresponsive to reality. When unresponsiveness to reality is in effect this would be irrational. Unresponsiveness shows when someone rigidly adheres to their ‘subjective distortions with utter certainty in the face of contrary evidence. When a person does show such rigidity, we contrast his or her views to ordinary emotions by labeling them ‘pathological.’”

These ‘pathological’ beliefs ‘are selfsustaining, and resistant to any disconfirming evidence’ as they ‘involve being subject to an unrelenting emotional state, unpunctuated by moments of feeling otherwise […] the person is both unable to feel differently in the present and unable to imagine feeling differently in the future.’ A person in this kind of state will only respond to factual evidence insofar as it supports their conviction. Such people have a diminished or compromised capacity for deliberation as it is ‘a necessary (but not sufficient) condition that the beliefs held about the subject of deliberation are or would be responsive to evidence. To deliberate, one needs to be able to think through alternatives, and this thinking through alternatives needs to be responsive to evidence.’ This kind of pathology may well be exhibited in some converts. What is required, though, is that there are some cases of conversion in which the responsiveness to reality is intact, and in these cases the possibility of rationality is likewise intact.

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68 Ibid, p. 112.
69 The term ‘pathological’ is not preferred by Halpern. Ibid.
70 Ibid.
A further claim against the rationality of emotions is that they ‘can distract us from what is most important in a situation by monopolizing our attention.’\textsuperscript{72} However, we noted earlier that this very same feature of emotions is what allows them to play a vital role in our cognition by directing our attention to the most important aspects of our surroundings and situations. So, the objection is right that emotions guide us in this way. And it is empirically true that this sometimes leads to errors and bad behaviour. However, just because they don’t guide us right one hundred percent of the time, this is not good enough reason to ignore them as a guide. Given that there is still room for our judgment about whether to act on our emotions or not this is not a good reason for the conclusion that emotions are not able to give us information on which we can make rational decisions.

Another reason for claiming that emotions are irrational is that they are sometimes seen to cause rash or inappropriate behaviour: ‘In ordinary language we speak of being ‘gripped’ and ‘torn’ by emotion: ‘drowned by sorrow’, ‘driven by anger’, ‘plagued by remorse’, or ‘struck by Cupid’s arrow’ when a person falls in love.’\textsuperscript{73} The accusation is that desires and strong emotions can sometimes prevent people from thinking things through, seeing what is good for them, or forming justified beliefs, and in such cases, emotions are to be deemed irrational, along with the things they influence (the beliefs, decisions, or actions).

This concern can be alleviated by plausibly denying the claim that there is a logical connection between \textit{feeling} an emotion and \textit{acting} on it. Once an emotion is felt there is room for personal agency with respect to how one \textit{reacts} to it. A measured, self-controlled person needn’t act out all his emotionally driven impulses and urges.\textsuperscript{74} The first step is to be mindful of our emotions. For of course, if one isn’t experiencing an emotion consciously there is no opportunity for anything but automatic or blind reaction. Yet, when we are mindful the picture looks more promising:

We can become aware of our automatic appraisals, or what the cognitive therapist calls the “autopilot of thinking patterns”. Ekman also says that we can achieve ‘impulse awareness’ following the awareness of automatic appraisals. One can also develop attentiveness by becoming aware of the causes of certain emotions and thus

\textsuperscript{72} Starkey, p. 450.
\textsuperscript{73} de Silva, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{74} I will argue for the kind of voluntarism this implies in §5.3.2.
identify hot emotional triggers and take steps to weaken them.\textsuperscript{75}

Interestingly, practices from the Buddhist religion involve such techniques, for example mindfulness meditation:

In using the art of quiet listening to become aware of emotional inroads in our mind, we develop diminishing reactivity to raw sensory events, avoid making automatic identifications with our reactions, develop openness, impartiality and flexibility, and train our minds and bodies to ‘wise seeing’. Such wise seeing adds an epistemic and cognitive dimension to our repertoire of techniques for managing emotions — opening up a window to grasp the truths about the human condition. There are in fact ‘transformative insights’ that emerge from a deep understanding of human emotions.\textsuperscript{76}

This is an example of how religious practice can actually improve the integration between the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of our mental processes (and may confer pragmatic justification to the performance of such practices). Once we are aware of them, it is possible to develop and train emotional responses.

By maintaining a healthy relationship between our emotions and practical reason, maintaining a critical perspective on our emotional responses and on the understandings that they produce, and cultivating appropriate emotional responses, we may avoid emotions that distort understanding and disable practical reason.\textsuperscript{77}

Additionally, ‘we can take emotional feelings to be cognitively important without supposing that they are important in proportion to the degree of their felt intensity, or that they are to be cultivated for their own sake.’\textsuperscript{78} One can avoid blindly irrational responses or reactions to emotions in this way, thus side-stepping the objection to the rationality of emotion.

One final claim for the irrationality of emotions is that emotionally aroused states leads to the use of poorer cognitive processes. Our emotions can lead us to process information in a different way. In his influential book, \textit{Thinking, Fast and

\textsuperscript{75} de Silva, p. 262.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Starkey, p. 451-2.
\textsuperscript{78} Wynn, \textit{Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding}, p. 194.
Slow, Kahneman divides our cognitive processes into two kinds, which he calls system-1 (fast) and system-2 (slow). System-1 is characterised by deliberate, conscious, rational thinking. System-2 is characterised by intuitive, gut-reaction, pre-conscious thinking. When we consciously focus on solving a difficult problem by thinking through the steps involved and reaching an answer, we are using system-1. When, on the other hand, we look at the same problem and come up with an educated guess that sounds or feels right, we are using system-2. System-1 makes us less likely to be influenced by things like biases and irrelevant information, but it is also metabolically expensive and time consuming. System-2 makes more mistakes, but the more skilled one is in the relevant area, the more likely the answer that system-2 gives us will be correct. Highly trained philosophers are more likely than average to guess correctly whether a complicated argument is valid based on their intuitive guess. Kahneman claims that when we are in a good mood (experiencing positive emotions that lack an intentional object) this leads to more reliance on system-1, whereas bad moods tend to lead us to more reliance on system-2. It is widely reported that religious experiences involve strong feelings of happiness, and that religious conversions also involve a shift to a state that often includes greater feelings of happiness (of one description or another). Thus, it might also be the case that these feelings of happiness lead to an increased reliance on intuitive thinking, and this may explain how new beliefs can be formed that were previously not forthcoming, even in the absence of new information. This is because the existing information is processed differently. However, this intuitive thinking need not be irrational. It may lead to a greater number of mistakes when the shortcuts relied upon are ill-informed. However, once someone is trained in a certain area, their instinctive, quick, or impulsive reactions to a question, problem, or situation, tends to be increasingly more accurate with increasing skill levels. Therefore emotion has not been shown to be irrational.

3.5. Concluding remarks.

In this chapter I have explored the nature of emotion, and sketched an account on which both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects are compounded in emotions. The cognitive and non-cognitive work together in the way that verbal and non-verbal mechanisms work together, and the influence can work in both directions, ‘Just as

79 Kahneman, pp. 13-14.
emotions influence ideas, so ideas brought in through text, song lyrics, sermons, or discussion affect emotion at the neurobiological and experiential levels.’  

The importance of integration between these two aspects is mirrored in the importance of integration between the affective and doxastic dimensions of religious conversion, where such integration is important for the integrity of the individual.

I argued that the emotions play an important role in religious conversion, both because the emotional life of the individual changes in conversion, and because this has the additional effects of influence on understanding, belief formation and retention, morality, and behaviour. What is emerging, through the repeated need to refer to beliefs and action in the discussion of emotions, is the interrelatedness of these dimensions.

One such connection that I explored was the influence of emotion on belief that results in self-deception. I argued for a non-intentionalist account of self-deception which took into account the top-down process of belief-formation where the emotion influences the belief despite the evidence, which has been argued to result in a less rational belief because of the separation of belief from evidence. However, this led me to consider the idea of rationality, and to sketch different ways in which we might consider something to be rational.

Thought is often considered paradigmatic of rationality, but ‘[r]esearch shows that thinking routinely involves mental short-cuts, and that everyday inferences and reasoning are generally guided by judgment heuristics and rough rules of thumb, rather than by explicit logic. Thought is not well characterized as being guided by “rationality as process”’.  

Thus even the cognitive process that is most hailed is unlikely to meet the standard of rationality so construed. I then considered arguments for and against the rationality of emotions. This discussion concluded that far from being an impediment to rationality, emotions are essential to it. Emotions can be justified either epistemically, (to the extent that they involve beliefs, which has clear consequences for the doxastic dimension of religious conversion) morally, or pragmatically, which has clear consequences for the dimension of praxis. I now turn to this final dimension, where I will focus not only on the role that behaviour plays in conversion, but its many points of contact with the doxastic and affective dimensions.

80 Norris, p. 190.  
81 Clore, p. 326.
CHAPTER 4

THE DIMENSION OF PRAXIS

‘How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God?... Practice gives the words their sense’

This chapter addresses the outwardly manifested changes in behaviour that occur in a religious conversion. Not all behaviour will be considered; I will consider only actions of religious significance, especially those that are sustained over a period of time. By ‘action’ I mean to rule out automatic and unintentional behaviour, and to rule in behaviours that can be attributed to a subject and are intentional. By narrowing the field to behaviours with ‘religious significance’ I mean to rule out circumstantial behavioural changes (like walk one’s dog on a Sunday afternoon rather than morning post-conversion) that are not telling of a deeper phenomenon. I mean to rule in anything that is directly relevant to one’s religiosity or expression of such. I will also focus on those behavioural changes that are sustained, rather than singular or sporadic. It will emerge that behavioural changes that are sustained in such a way as to (partly) constitute the pattern of one’s life will be those actions that stem directly from or contribute directly to religious beliefs and emotion. The kinds of behaviour I’ll consider include praying, kissing a cross, going to church, taking communion, confessing, celebrating religious holidays, and many others, which I will collectively refer to as religious ceremonies and rituals. Examples of the role of praxis in religious conversion are highlighted in these first-person accounts of conversion where we can note attendance at religious events, prayer, confession, kneeling, going to the altar in a church, and repeating a mantra:

I was taken to a camp-meeting, mother and religious friends seeking and praying for

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1 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 85e.
2 In a similar vein to the argument offered in 1.2.1 and 1.2.2 about the usefulness of defining ‘religion’, which concluded that we might most usefully see that as a family resemblance concept, I will assume here that for similar reasons ‘religious ritual’ or ‘religious ceremony’ are also family resemblance concepts. This means that while we have a coherent and usable concept of rituals, there is not one and only one set of criteria to mark them out, and nor should there be only one way of understanding them (Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §66-7). Rather, there are many characteristics, some combination of which is present in ritualistic actions, but not all of them necessary.
my conversion. My emotional nature was stirred to its depths; confessions of depravity and pleading with God for salvation from sin made me oblivious of all surroundings. I plead for mercy, and had a vivid realization of forgiveness and renewal of my nature. When rising from my knees I exclaimed, ‘Old things have passed away, all things have become new.’

I had attended a series of revival services for about two weeks off and on. Had been invited to the altar several times, all the time becoming more deeply impressed, when finally I decided I must do this, or I should be lost. Realization of conversion was very vivid, like a ton’s weight being lifted from my heart; a strange light which seemed to light up the whole room (for it was dark); a conscious supreme bliss which caused me to repeat ‘Glory to God’ for a long time.

I will explore the nature of praxis, and the role it plays in the conversion process. In particular, I will explore the role of the affective aspect of religious rituals, and the doxastic aspect of religious rituals. A useful focal point for this discussion is the debate between those who think that ritual is purely doxastic, and those who think it is purely affective.

In the former camp is Frazer, as exposited in his *Golden Bough*, where he argues that religious rituals are the instrumental actions conducted on the basis of certain beliefs in order to bring about a certain result. For example, when someone prays, they are performing an instrumental action, based on beliefs – such as that God is listening and can intervene with human affairs, or that God is fond of worship and will favour those who worship him – and this is done to bring about a certain result, usually that the object of the prayer is granted, or that they gain some headway to salvation as a result of their worship. I call this perspective ‘intellectualism’, and if this view were adopted the consequence for my thesis would be that the link between doxastic dimension and the dimension of praxis is significant. After considering Frazer’s exposition of this perspective I will argue that that it is not a fair and complete analysis of rituals.

In the latter camp we find certain interpretations of Wittgenstein, which claim that engagement in religious rituals is driven by emotion and the action is an expression of the emotion that drives it. I call this view ‘expressivism’ and if this view

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3 James, p. 244. (Quoting Starbuck.)
4 Ibid, p. 246. (Quoting Starbuck.)
were correct the link between the affective dimension and the dimension of praxis would be significant. I will argue that (aside from being an incorrect interpretation of Wittgenstein) there is more to ritual than emotional expression. I will conclude the section with a sketch of a positive account of what is involved in rituals that fuses these opposing views into a more integrated and plausible explanation, and holds a significant place for both the doxastic and affective dimensions. It will emerge that all three dimensions are present with interaction between each pair.

The final section focuses on one action in particular; that of acceptance. Acceptance can be seen as a bridge between the dimension of praxis and the doxastic dimension, and can illuminate the connections between dimensions well. This leads to a conclusion that summarises the nature of and interactions between the various dimensions of religious conversion, so at the close of this chapter a fuller picture of the conversion picture will have be painted.

4.1. The nature of religious rituals.

In Chapter Two – The Doxastic Dimension, I discussed the role of belief in religious conversion and concluded that conversion will often involve changes to the belief set of the individual. Intellectualism is the view that any religious rituals that a convertee begins to partake in, and any practices that they adopt, are instrumental and can be explained as the result of new religious beliefs, which inform the ends they are trying to achieve in their enactment. In The Golden Bough, Frazer writes that in order to understand a ritual, one should conduct some kind of historical or empirical enquiry to discover how this practice originated, what the beliefs or hypotheses are that underlie it, and what results one is aiming to achieve by performing the ritual. He thinks that participants conduct instrumental activities, which are impotent because they are based on faulty beliefs. Thus the engagement in ritualistic activity is an error, based on a mistake. Beattie elucidates instrumental activity in contrast with expressive activity as follows:
Instrumental activity is directed to bringing about some desired state of affairs; it is oriented towards an end. Expressive activity is a way of saying or expressing something; usually some idea or state of mind.\(^5\)

On this view, then, the connection between beliefs and religious acts is highlighted and the belief plays an explanatory role in understanding the religious acts. It also says something about the purpose of those acts.

Wittgenstein, in his *Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough*, aims to repudiate the intellectualism found in Frazer’s approach, claiming that ‘Frazer’s account of the magical and religious views of mankind is unsatisfactory: it makes these views look like mistakes’ and they are not best understood as mistakes.\(^6\) Wittgenstein points to the claim that the information Frazer thinks leads to an understanding of rituals is neither necessary nor sufficient for such understanding.

One objection Wittgenstein makes is that if people really believed in the efficacy of their rituals, then they would surely perform them when the result they are supposed to produce would be most beneficial. However, the rainmaking ritual of the Abyssinian people is performed only when the rainy season comes. In response to this data Wittgenstein asserts that this ‘means that they do not really believe that he can make it rain, otherwise they would do it in the dry periods’.\(^7\)

However, this is a non sequitur. It might be that the Abyssinians also believe that the Alfai (the Rain-King), is only responsive during certain times, somewhat in the fashion of a tax-redemption you can claim only at the end of the tax year, but *only* if you apply for it. When rain fails to come ‘the Alfai is stoned to death’,\(^8\) and this evidence supports the view that the Abyssinians do have an instrumental belief because this makes no sense if they don’t hold him responsible. However, while this shows the misfortune of using this particular example, even one successful example would show that instrumental beliefs cannot explain all cases of ritual. There are some cases in which it would be extremely uncharitable to assume that people really thought their actions had instrumental value, or that they literally believe that which is

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only symbolic. Wittgenstein illustrates the point with the example of an adoption ceremony in which the adoptive mother pulls the child through her clothes in a symbolic simulation of birth. After this the community sees her as the mother of this child. I think Wittgenstein is correct in saying ‘it is surely insane to believe that an error is present and that she believes she has given birth to the child’. If one is aiming at a target, and misses, this is a mistake, but if there is no such aim or target, it makes no sense to call the result a mistake, which undermines Frazer’s account.

Whatever we think about Frazer’s examples based on the ancient or ‘uncivilized’ people featured in his illustrations, it is implausible to suppose that everyone who takes part in rituals today in our society (including those with vast intellect, scientific knowledge, and reasoning skills) still believe in such a radically ‘false physics’ behind their ritualistic actions. If we are to account for their participation at all, we need to look beyond Frazer’s intellectualist account. Either there is an instrumental element, but it is not sufficient to account for the participation of certain people, or there is none, in which case it cannot be necessary for such understanding is to be had at all.

Another issue with the intellectualist view is that the historical facts regarding the origin of rituals and corresponding beliefs about those facts are not necessary for rituals to have the meaning that they do today.

It can indeed happen, and often does today, that a person will give up a practice after he has recognized an error on which it was based. But this happens only when calling someone’s attention to his error is enough to turn him from his way of behaving. But this is not the case with the religious practices of a people and therefore there is no question of an error.

To use Hacker’s example, even if Jews discovered that actually the children of Israel ate pita rather than Matzot (as is currently believed) this would not affect the contemporary practice of eating Matzot as part of the Passover celebration. If this is

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9 Compare the ‘obviousness of error’ argument, Clack, p. 33.
11 Compare Wittgenstein: to ‘try’ implies the possibility of failing, (Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, §§622-3) and ‘know’ implies the possibility of doubt, (Ibid, §679).
13 Ibid, p. 121. (Original emphasis.)
true (and if it isn’t some similar example would be) then the link between the belief about the fact and the practice cannot be necessary.\textsuperscript{15} If the historical fact or the belief about it are not necessary for the meaning of the ritual, it cannot be necessary in order to explain the ritual, for that would make the ritual inexplicable whenever the historical fact was in fact false or unknown. Contemporary rituals wouldn’t be inexplicable if the facts they are (ostensibly) based upon were disproven and the beliefs about them ceased to be held. And even if they were, the ritual need not lose its depth or significance.\textsuperscript{16}

The hypothesis or belief that a ritual is based upon is also not enough to explain the impression that a ritual makes on us. Wittgenstein raises the following question:

If I see a man being killed, –is what makes an impression on me simply what I see, or is it only the hypothesis that here a man is being killed?\textsuperscript{17}

If it were merely the hypothesis that ‘here a man is being killed’ which made the impression on me, I should have the same reaction to a loving family committing euthanasia, a prisoner on death row killed by a lethal injection, and the murder of an innocent man by poisoning. That these instances of a man being killed do not make the same impression on me shows that the hypothesis is not sufficient for our understanding of the event. I think that these three examples would require a different understanding, even though the method and result is similar in each case. The converse situation where the very same beliefs might generate different ritualistic actions in different people, or in the same people at different times adds force to this objection to Frazer:

Recall that after Schubert’s death his brother cut some of Schubert’s scores into small pieces and gave such pieces, consisting of a few bars, to his favorite pupils. This act, as a sign of piety, is just as understandable to us as the different one of keeping the

\textsuperscript{15} This isn’t to say belief in general couldn’t be a necessary part of ritual, but that no specific belief can be necessary to a particular ritual.


\textsuperscript{17} Wittgenstein, ‘Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough’, p. 149.
scores untouched, accessible to no-one. And if Schubert’s brother had burned the scores, that too would be understandable as a sign of piety.\textsuperscript{18}

Knowing the facts involved cannot always lead one to understand the \textit{specific} behaviour of the ritualist. So an intellectual explanation is not sufficient to explain rituals because even when we know all of the beliefs that a person holds and all the facts or hypotheses they take to be true, we might still be missing something important; what we know is not sufficient to explain why ritualists act the way that they do.

We can consider what is missed by the intellectualist if we consider what we might experience if we witnessed a strange ritual, having been told only the Frazerean facts. Armed with these facts, we might understand partly why these people engage in the ritual, some of what (if anything) they hope to achieve by it, and perhaps if we knew it was a matter of life or death (for example praying for good harvest during a famine) we might also understand the solemnity with which it was carried out. Yet we would still be at a loss to understand, for example, the peculiarities of the ritual or the symbols they used. When witnessing the rain ritual, or Holy Communion, or the Beltane Fire-festival, we could still wonder at why there is a costume, a wafer, or a cake, and what it is that strikes us as deep, or sinister in these rituals.

The impression made on us (that it strikes us as deep, or sinister, or whatever) is certain, in that it cannot be doubted or falsified. Wittgenstein says that ‘Compared with the impression which the thing described makes on us the explanation is too uncertain’.\textsuperscript{19} The explanation thus seems to be highlighted as unnecessary for the impression which is made on us, for the impression is certain even though there is a possibility that the explanation is incorrect. From Frazer’s point of view, this is no objection, for it is part of the concept of a scientific explanation that the explanans is less certain than the explanandum – an explanation is a series of statements designed to shed light on something that is already accepted as a matter-of-fact. However, it’s also part of the notion of scientific explanation that ‘an explanation is not fully adequate unless its explanans, if taken account of in time, could have served as a basis for predicting the phenomenon under consideration’.\textsuperscript{20} (This model of explanation –

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 123.
called the Deductive-Nomological model – has it critics, but serves well enough here.)

It is required of an explanation in this sense, that ‘the explanandum must be a logical
consequence of the explanans’ and ‘the sentences constituting the explanans must be
true’.\(^{21}\) Thus if, as suggested by Wittgenstein, one cannot, from the uncertain
hypotheses offered by Frazer predict the whole phenomenon of ritual (as I have
argued), the kind of explanation offered by Frazer is not a fully adequate explanation.

In discussion of the Beltane Fire-festival, Rhees concludes that: ‘in one sense
we have explained it; explained, perhaps, the performance of it in this place and at
this time of year, and also the burning of the straw figure. But in a sense that is more
important for Wittgenstein, it does not explain.’\(^{22}\) We might then see the disagreement
as follows. There are at least two distinct senses of explanation that have legitimate
uses. Frazer only gives what might aptly be called an ‘historico-scientific’ explanation
of ritual, but Wittgenstein sees the need for a more holistic one due to the
shortcomings we have identified in the purely scientific approach. Wittgenstein says
that:

> An historical explanation, an explanation as an hypothesis of development, is only
> one kind of summary of the data… We can equally well see the data in their relations
to one another and make a summary of them in a general picture without putting it in
> the form of an hypothesis regarding the temporal development.\(^{23}\)

To state the contention in these terms, an historico-scientific explanation is not
adequate to understand a ritual, and therefore the intellectualist view is inadequate.
And this in turn suggests that the role that rituals and practices play in explaining
religious conversions is not reducible to that played by religious beliefs plus a story
about the action-guiding or motivational quality of such beliefs.\(^{24}\) Understanding the
beliefs relevant to practicing religious rituals is important to understanding them, but
Wittgenstein correctly highlights the inadequacy of Frazer’s account. We can
understand Frazer’s motivation insofar as we too have the tendency to ask ‘What is

\(^{21}\) Hempel, C., Aspects of Scientific Explanation and Other Essays in the Philosophy of Science, New

\(^{22}\) Rhees, p. 99.


\(^{24}\) ‘The practice of religious observance as a way of either placating the gods or ascertaining their
intentions may long outlive any literal belief in the Gods themselves’. Warnock, Mary, Dishonest to
this performance trying to do, what is its point?” However, as the plays of Samuel Beckett might have taught us, there is not always a point, at least, not always of the kind that we are seeking.

While we have now loosened the connection between beliefs and ritualistic action, it doesn’t follow that we should adopt an expressivist account as an alternative. The expressivist claims that rituals are only expressions of emotions or attitudes. Some have read Wittgenstein as positing an expressivist view, and evidence for this is taken from passages such as the following:

When I am furious about something, I sometimes beat the ground or a tree with my walking stick. But I certainly do not believe that the ground is to blame or that my beating can help anything. “I am venting my anger”. And all rites are of this kind.

Note however that he does not say ‘only of this kind’. So the passage does not demand the interpretation that all rites are solely (or merely) expressive, only that there is at least an expressive element. Evidence against the interpretation of Wittgenstein as an expressivist can be found in the following remark regarding a festival where men ride around on each other’s backs:

…if we knew that among many peoples it has been the custom, say, to employ slaves as riding animals and, so mounted, to celebrate certain festivals, we would now see something deeper and less harmless in the harmless practice of our time.

Here I agree with Clack, who thinks that ‘we should do well to see this as a sign of an exemplary openness with regard to the diversity of rituals, which are not regarded here as universally expressive in character’. This suggests that the facts can (at least sometimes) be relevant to how one should interpret a festival, and likewise, the beliefs of those taking part will alter the significance of the festival.

An expressivist view (although I don’t think this is the correct reading of Wittgenstein) can be targeted by claiming that as a description of a social phenomenon, it is empirically false to claim that rituals are merely expressive. Cook

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26 Ibid, p. 137.
cites ethnographic data that shows that there are rituals that are definitely intended to be efficacious by the ritualist. Further reason for rejecting a purely expressivist account comes from the conclusion drawn in §3.1 that emotions themselves are not purely non-cognitive. If affect involves a cognitive element, then even if rituals were an expression of emotion, they would nevertheless be partially cognitive. A further consequence of the cognitive-non-cognitive mix that we find here, is that any account that focuses on only one to the exclusion of the other cannot help but miss part of the story. Both the expressivist and the intellectualist view are overly general because they take account of only part of what it is to understand a ritual and as such miss something of what we need for a full understanding. It is with this inspiration that I now turn to some positive comments about how to understand religious rituals. I take inspiration from Wittgenstein’s claims about how to understand rituals, so I begin by unpacking some of his key claims.

Wittgenstein says that ritual can be represented ‘by means of an evolutionary hypothesis, … but also by means of the arrangement of its factual content alone, in a ‘perspicuous’ representation.’ By ‘perspicuous representation’ he means that which brings about understanding, which consists in the fact that we ‘see the connections’. The connections that are important in understanding a ritual are those between the practice and ourselves. Understanding ritual is not merely comprised of knowing which beliefs are involved, but also in knowing how the beliefs relate to each other and to other things. We might say that ‘there is a way of seeing how those who are engaged in creating and transmitting myths, actually stand in relation to their myths and practices’.

What we have understood in addition to any relevant historico-scientific facts when we understand a ritual will be the ‘inner nature’ of that ritual. Wittgenstein elucidates:

[By] the inner nature of the practice, I mean all circumstances under which it is carried out and which are not included in a report of such a festival, since they consist

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29 Cook, pp. 11-16.
31 cf. Ibid. Understanding will be discussed in §5.2.
32 Bell, p. 122.
33 Cf. ‘it is clearly the inner nature of the modern practice itself which seems sinister to us, and the familiar facts of human sacrifice only indicate the lines along which we should view the practice.’ (Wittgenstein, ‘Remarks on Frazer’s Golden Bough’, p. 144).
not so much in the specific actions which characterize the festival as in what one might call the spirit of the festival; such things as would be included in one’s description, for example, of the kind of people who take part in it, their behaviour at other times, that is, their character; the kinds of games they otherwise play. And one would then see that the sinister quality lies in the character of these people themselves.\textsuperscript{34}

These things comprise what Wittgenstein calls the ‘spirit’ of a ritual, and it is \textit{this} that the historico-scientific facts cannot explain. Armed only with an historico-scientific explanation the ritual remains enigmatic because ‘the explanation isn’t what satisfies us here at all’.\textsuperscript{35}

Wittgenstein’s emphasis on the kind of people involved, their behaviour during the ritual and in their wider culture, and their characters, points to the need to understand \textit{more} than merely all the facts involved. We can understand better by picturing ourselves present in a real ritual, imagining that we know only the Frazerean facts. Even with all of the historico-scientific data, we would be struck very differently by a baptism if, in one case, the parents of the child being baptized were happy, proud, and handed their child over graciously to the priest to be baptized, and in another case the parents were nervous, tearful, and handed over the child reluctantly. What we have is a difference in the spirit of the ceremony in the respective cases. We tend to think that the first is more fitting, and more in line with the spirit of the ceremony as it functions in the Christian religion. In another religion, perhaps one where baptism is a marking of sinners so they can be sent to hell, one would expect the spirit of the occasion to be different in various obvious and subtle ways. These differences can be understood not just as differences in the affect \textit{generated} by their participation, but in the affect experienced by those who participate that \textit{moves them} to participate.

For instance, if we want to understand why the Beltane Fire-festival has depth and seems sinister, part of this understanding is understanding the feeling from which the urge to participate, and to participate in \textit{that way}, arises. That will involve understanding the inner nature, the spirit of this ritual, and the part it plays in the wider lives of the participants. When we understand this, we will also know that the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 144-5.

sinister quality comes from the people themselves, that is, the ritual acts as a medium for expression of something that is already present in those that are moved to participate in the ritual. The spirit of a ritual comes largely from the role that it plays in the societies in which it is practiced. One way that we come to understand the inner nature is by extrapolating from one’s own experiences and feelings, and once a ritual ‘is brought into connection with an instinct which I myself possess, this is precisely the explanation wished for’. 36 Only when we understand something in ourselves that might lead us to perform this or a similar ritual in similar circumstances will we feel satisfied. 37 What it takes to understand a ritual is a comprehension of what is involved in relation to our own lives and how the instincts involved in the ritual act connect with our own instincts. We can thus draw an important result about conversion. In order to fully understand conversion to a religious life one must connect the practices and behaviours associated with it to some religious impulse that one has in oneself, which can thereby explain it.

This conclusion suggests the following objection. Bell claims that when faced with Frazer’s account we aren’t satisfied because ‘we must still “find our feet”’ in relation to the ritual. 38 Whether Wittgenstein’s positive comments can allow us to ‘find our feet’ is still an open question. Wittgenstein himself was an outsider to many of the kinds of ritual discussed, as was Frazer. Wittgenstein in his later work says:

one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them. 39

If understanding a ritual involves seeking some similar impulse to that we find in the ritual, in ourselves, then we must accept the consequence that we only understand them ‘in so far as we have acted in similar deep, and perhaps sinister, ways within our own particular form of life’. 40 The objection is that this subjectifies religious understanding to quite a degree. In cases where a ceremonial act is performed by

37 Cf. Bell, p. 122.
38 Ibid.
40 Bell, p. 123.
those in a different religion, (or even a different church within the same religion) we might fail to ‘find our feet’ with their strange acts. If I observe an alien ritual I may be completely at sea and have no means to form an empathetic connection with them at all. Yet, even if I do infer something by analogy with myself, it is possible that I have missed the point completely, even while feeling satisfied and having the impression that I understand it, and moreover, I may have no way to tell the difference. Unless this can be resolved this account of understanding rituals is going to leave us unsatisfied because ‘what [Wittgenstein] calls the ’spirit of the festival’ is impenetrable’. It is unclear just what needs to be involved in order for us to understand the spirit, but if it is the case that foreign gestures are as incomprehensible as foreign words, then we will really be lost when it comes to rituals not based on some shared ground. If we don’t share certain features with the ritualists we will never understand. This account therefore has some serious consequences for the possibility of inter-religious dialogue, as well as a difficulty in expounding the role of ritual in religious conversion.

Wittgenstein claims that perspicuous representation ‘denotes the form of our representation, the way we see things. (A kind of Weltanschauung as it is apparently typical of our time...)’ Thus the impasse between Frazer and Wittgenstein might be understood in terms of their very different world views – it accounts for why Wittgenstein can relate to the spiritual while believing that Frazer is spiritually impoverished (‘What a narrow spiritual life on Frazer’s part! As a result: how impossible it was for him to conceive of a life different from that of the England of his time!’) This explains why Wittgenstein thought that Frazer would only have succeeded in convincing those who already think and feel the way he does. Those rituals that arise from a Weltanschauung different enough from our own will simply remain an enigma.

There is something very unsatisfying about this – we certainly want to feel as though rituals can be understood. However, one might claim this is not so much an objection, as a description of the way we really find things. Perhaps you have

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41 Ibid, p. 120.
occasionally felt alienated by ‘the opposition’ in religious debates because assumptions have already been made that you cannot accept, or can at least relate to this or a similar situation. From the perspective of some atheists, nothing could be stranger or more irrational than the religious life, and from some religious points of view, nothing more impoverished than the atheistic one. In which case we would not understand religious conversion except to the extent to which we are moved towards conversion ourselves.

On the other hand, perhaps these differences are overstated. Wittgenstein says that ‘one could very easily invent primitive practices oneself, and it would be pure luck if they were not actually found somewhere’\textsuperscript{46} and ‘[i]f I wanted to make up a festival, it would die out very quickly or be modified in such a manner that it corresponds to a general inclination of the people’.\textsuperscript{47} These comments point to a view whereby all people share a common humanity, and the impulses that lead to and comprise our ritual actions are the very things that define our human-condition. While it might be true that we won’t understand whenever the community is alien enough, it is true that in many cases we don’t understand rituals. However, in many, perhaps most cases, the common humanity we share will be enough to give us some understanding even very unfamiliar practices. The religious impulse, whatsoever this might be exactly, is an incredibly pervasive one, both synchronically and diachronically. The time investment it would take from us in order to finally accomplish a perspicuous representation may well be a higher price than it is worth paying to understand an unfamiliar view, and so it may rarely be achieved. However, with enough time and energy put into immersing oneself into a foreign religious culture, given the deeper human traits that we share, we could come to understand.

This leaves open the possibility of inter-faith dialogue, while at the same time warning that success in this may often present a difficult challenge.\textsuperscript{48} The clear message here is that the key to understanding the role of ritual in religious conversion, is to take part in the rituals, and to immerse yourself in the activities that comprise a religious life. Wittgenstein’s interlocutor poses the same question, and he answers: ‘How do I know that two people mean the same when each says he believes in God?...

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{47} Ibid, p. 148-9.
\textsuperscript{48} Mirroring the issues we saw in §1.2.3 with inter-faith dialogue resulting from differences in linguistic context.
Practice gives the words their sense’.

We have raised the question of how to fix the meaning of religious language given that language users attach different meanings to the same terms, and even where the intention is to use a term in the same way, problems of vagueness and context-sensitivity abound. However, the answer here is that from inside the language game there is not a problem. The problem occurs when we are on the outside looking in, which is the position from which most philosophising in conducted, and the solution is to immerse oneself in the language game as it naturally occurs: ‘for someone for whom this “conceptual re-orientation” does not occur, no real understanding of the sentence (or words) in question is possible.’ This immersion often takes place without a deliberate intention, as when someone is raised in a religious tradition. Sometimes the immersion coincides with a shift in one’s personal circumstances, like my sister’s emigration (which happened during her adolescence: statistically a common time that conversions occur). This result accords with other statistical and anecdotal information about the common circumstances of conversion, which include marriage into a religious family, emigration to a religious community, grief, ill-health or near-death experiences, and addiction or alcoholism. However, (as I’ll discuss in §5.3.2) one may also decide to engage in religious rituals voluntarily. Doing so may lead to us recognizing the spirit of such rituals in relation to the aspects of ourselves that would motivate us to participate in these, or similar activities. This may lead to changes in one’s beliefs and emotions. Integrating our understanding of both the doxastic and affective aspects of religious practice leads us to a position where understanding is possible. I’ll now explore this integration in more detail.

4.2. The interplay between praxis and other dimensions.

It is a plausible position that doing differently is a sign of being different. If a change in outward behaviour is indeed a reflection of inner change, then the dimension of praxis is significant not only intrinsically, but also extrinsically in that it can guide us to posit that other changes have occurred, and predict further changes (such as in

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49 Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, 85e.
51 Christensen, ‘Religious Conversion in Adolescence’. See also James, p. 197 and pp. 209-10.
52 Ibid, and personal communication.
beliefs or emotions). I argue here that by engaging in different behaviour we are changing not just our present, but our future, because our experiences of ‘doings’ affect us and expose us to different stimulus for beliefs and feelings, and these in turn will influence the further actions we take.

In §3.1 I claimed that emotions can be intentional. Wynn aptly notes that ‘the kind of intentionality realised in feeling is inseparably action-guiding intentionality: the meanings borne by feelings are defined in part by the role of those feelings in guiding behaviour.’\(^{53}\) There is a causal and a conceptual link between emotion and action.

The deeper point is conceptual. If a friend tells you that she is furious with you, but does so calmly, with a relaxed posture, and continues her relation to you in a perfectly ordinary fashion, you’d justifiably be dubious about the sincerity of that feeling. It just doesn’t make sense to think that she is really furious. Fury is borne out in the actions that follow. ‘[O]n this [Greenspan’s] view the meanings of emotional feeling are fixed (at least in part) by their role in behavioural response.’\(^{54}\) Likewise, being in a state of loving someone is incompatible with causing them deliberate harm. If I cause them deliberate harm you would be perfectly justified in claiming that, whatever I may think, what I feel in that moment is not really love. So it is more than a causal link, but a conceptual one, between feelings and action.\(^{55}\)

Emotions can guide action in various ways that are not conceptual, but might be seen as closer to a causal connection. For instance, if we came across a vicious animal we might naturally feel fear. The fear plays several roles in ensuring our survival in this situation. We’d most likely both experience some very similar physiological changes (like the release of adrenaline). This prepares our body for engagement or flight, and as Wynn says, ‘feelings owe their intentionality, at least in part, to an awareness of the body’s readiness to act’.\(^{56}\) This doesn’t cause any specific behaviour, but nevertheless the emotion is part of whatever causal chain unfolds – perhaps you are stronger than I am and bravely stay to fight the animal, while I flee.

\(^{54}\) Ibid.
\(^{55}\) It is not a necessary link, in that a certain feeling must always be accompanied by a specific act, because we can choose not to act on certain feelings, or to act against them. However, we may choose to see this as deviant, for whenever one suppresses or acts against one’s true feelings, this (although I cannot, in company with the discipline of psychology, prove this scientifically) can manifest negatively with dissonant feelings, and can over time lead to any number of physical and mental health problems.
\(^{56}\) Ibid, p. 133-4.
Our actions are different, but we have both been motivated to act and enabled appropriately to act by the emotion of fear. The emotional experience does *guide* action (although it does not *determine* it).

Emotions also guide action in that we have a tendency to seek out certain feelings, and to avoid others. According to Clore, ‘*[r]elevant research showed that when people act in ways that are inconsistent with their beliefs, a state of tension or cognitive dissonance is generated, which motivates them to adjust their beliefs to make them consistent with their actions—the process of dissonance reduction.*’ \(^57\) For instance, anxiety may be taken as a sign that something is wrong, and may lead us to act in ways to remove the problem or minimise discomfort. For example, by preparing more comprehensively for a speech, or leaving earlier to catch an important train. The way this may be relevant to conversion can be illustrated as follows. One may at a certain point feel tension between the belief that there is no God, and the feeling of awe experienced when considering the magnitude and beauty of the universe, or more dramatically, after a religious experience. This might inspire someone to read or engage in conversation on this topic (which in turn might lead to the formation of religious belief). There is no *single* formula: loneliness might motivate the search for a community in which one can feel belonging, and this might be a religious community; helplessness might motivate faith in a higher power; grief may motivate the participation in religious rituals. All of these things may in turn re-enforce any religious beliefs that are held, and these new beliefs might then give rise to further emotions, and so on. In light of this, we can see how a negative emotional reaction to a felt tension between one’s beliefs and practices, or between one’s practices and feelings, or feelings and beliefs, could motivate someone to reconcile this tension by acting in ways that might be conducive to doing so.

In the other direction, those who engage in religious behaviour will experience various affects. These in turn will interact with the other dimension, as described. Clore makes the following observation (although he makes it about children, the process is the same for adult converts). First one adopts a gesture or posture (which may be for any reason at all):

> Gradually the physical and emotional dimensions of worship become embodied

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\(^57\) Clore, p. 328.
personal experience, and, each time a gesture is repeated the kinesthetic and emotional memory of that gesture is evoked, layering, compounding, and shaping present experience. Images, ideas, and emotional and physical associations (including both kinesthetic and contextual sensory experience) are all active and present in the experience of a ritual gesture or posture. Each repetition of a posture of worship with the body not only reinforces the associations but also recalls the feeling associations.\textsuperscript{58}

As well as a two-way relationship between emotion and behaviour, there is also a two-way relationship between beliefs and behaviour, such that ‘it makes no sense to think that the “beliefs” can be specified (in anything but a purely minimalist – ‘external’ – sense) completely independently of the practices in which they are embedded (and vice versa).’\textsuperscript{59} Religious behaviour can lead to religious belief formation and retention. According to Pascal, ‘behaving in certain ways’ (called ‘custom’)\textsuperscript{60} is a source of belief. He says:

Custom is the source of our strongest and most believed proofs. It bends the automaton, which persuades the mind without its thinking about the matter. […] We must get an easier belief, which is that of custom, which, without violence, without art, without argument, makes us believe things and inclines all our powers to this belief, so that our soul falls naturally into it.\textsuperscript{61}

Custom includes which things we do, which activities we participate in, and the usual pattern of our lives. If I never act in any way that would expose me to new evidence relevant to the proposition that grass is green (let’s say I retreat to the desert for the remainder of my days with no contact to the outside world), I will never change my rational grounds for forming a new belief regarding the colour of grass. On the other hand, whenever I act in the world so that I visit new and foreign grasslands, I thereby expose myself to new data that can form the basis for new belief formation. When someone engages in religious behaviour they expose themselves to things that place them in a different epistemic position with respect to certain religious propositions, and so in this way, religious behaviour can lead to a change in the religious belief set.

\textsuperscript{58} Norris, p. 190.
\textsuperscript{59} Schönbaumsfeld, p. 434.
\textsuperscript{60} Pascal, \textit{Pensées}, 245.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 252.
For example, by taking a course of study in religious studies, theology or philosophy of religion, one will expose oneself to arguments that aim to prove God’s existence (among other things) and one will also improve the rational faculties that enable one to appreciate and construct such arguments. By leading a more aesthetically and morally attuned lifestyle one might make the occurrence of religious experiences more likely, thereby rendering the likelihood of forming a belief more likely. By going to places of worship we make ourselves open to relationships with those who believe, and therefore expose ourselves to testimony that may be convincing and lead to the formation of religious beliefs. Other suitable activities would be reading scripture and engaging in religious practices or rituals.

The interaction between religious beliefs and behaviour occurs in the other direction too, in that religious beliefs can motivate and guide religious behaviour. Clifford goes as far as to say: ‘Nor is that truly a belief at all which has not some influence upon the actions of him who holds it.’ 62 If I believe I’m in an empty room, I’ll plot a straight trajectory when I want to exit through the door on the opposite side. However, if my belief set changes so that I now believe that there is a table in the centre of the room, this belief will guide my behaviour in that I am now likely to take a diversion around the edge of the room to exit through the same door. Likewise, if you come to believe that God listens to prayers, this may guide your actions and motivate you to pray when you would not otherwise have done so. In this way beliefs guide and motivate behaviour, so there is a simple sense in which changes in belief will lead to changes in behaviour. Likewise, changes in behaviour can be explained by changes in belief. When someone acts in a new or unexpected way, we may make sense of this by inferring that some belief has changed. If I form a new religious belief, this will have a direct effect on the way I behave in some respects. If I believe that praying is efficacious, I might pray in a situation where I would not have prayed without that belief. If I believe that God is judging me for my actions, I may act in a way that accords with what I believe his commands are when I otherwise would not have done.

I’ve now claimed that religious behaviour can lead to religious beliefs, and religious beliefs can lead to religious behaviour. But as far as understanding conversion goes, so far this is a closed circuit: how does the circle begin? Without

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some further explanation it seems that we will first start off with an inexplicably formed religious belief which then leads to religious behaviour which in turn can form and re-enforce religious beliefs, or, we first start off with unmotivated religious behaviour which would then lead to the formulation of religious beliefs. There are two ways out of this supposed dilemma.

The first, drawing on the understanding of ritual discussed above, is to appeal to the role of the emotions in the conversion spiral. The starting point is religious behaviour, but this is not unmotivated merely because it is not motivated by a pre-existing belief. It is motivated first by an affect. I have some feeling, some impulse, and this drives me to participate in some religious activity, which in turn leads me to form religious beliefs.

The second is to focus on other epistemic states than belief that might explain participation in religious practices. Alston points out that ‘the term “belief” has been allowed to spread over any positive propositional attitude.’ 63 We can draw out distinctions between belief and other relevant propositional attitudes, and then consider the roles that these separate propositional attitudes might have. This may avoid a distorted and possibly exaggerated account of the role of belief in religious conversion. One such epistemic state is that of acceptance, which I now briefly discuss.

4.3. The role of acceptance.

A specific action that has a special significance to conversion, and can solve the aforementioned problem with the connection between behaviour and belief, is that of acceptance. The role of acceptance in conversion is illustrated in the following quotation:

Gospel salvation seemed to me to be an offer of something to be accepted, and all that was necessary on my part to get my own consent to give up my sins and accept Christ. After this distinct revelation had stood for some little time before my mind, the question seemed to be put, ‘will you accept it now, to-day?’ I replied, ‘Yes; I will accept it to-day, or I will die in the attempt!’ 64

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64 Quoted from James, pp. 205-6.
Alston posits two differences between belief and acceptance. Firstly, while acceptance is a mental act, belief is a disposition to various reactions involving the proposition. The positive attitude one adopts towards a proposition when one accepts is something that one does. The second key difference is that while acceptance is directly voluntary, beliefs are not. He sees a distinction too between accepting a proposition and adopting an assumption or working hypothesis:

[One] can adopt an assumption, a working hypothesis, for the sake of action guidance without accepting it. Accepting $p$ involves a more positive attitude toward that proposition than just making the assumption that $p$ or hypothesizing that $p$. The difference could be put this way. To accept that $p$ is to regard it as true, though one need not be explicitly deploying the concept of truth in order to do so. But one can assume or hypothesize that $p$ for a particular limited purpose, [...] without taking any stand on truth-value.

In the philosophy seminar room when we are engaging in the philosophy of religion, we need to neither accept nor believe the proposition that ‘God exists’ to assert it as the premise in an argument. Merely entertaining the hypothesis or adopting as an assumption is not sufficient for religious conversion, but acceptance is more than this. Acceptance, while not as strong as belief, is strong enough to be action-guiding, and can therefore explain and justify changes in behaviour. Such changes in behaviour might eventually lead to a full belief. The standard for justification of acceptance is lower than for belief. What counts as a sufficient reason for accepting a doctrine might not also count as sufficient reason for believing it. This is precisely the kind of thing that pragmatic arguments like Pascal’s wager rely on – while the wager cannot seem to lead us directly to belief, it can lead us directly to acceptance. We might

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65 Alston, ‘Belief Acceptance and Religious Faith’, p. 8-9. Buckareff makes a more fine grained distinction and lists six respects in which belief and acceptance differ: 1. ‘belief aims at truth, while acceptance aims at utility or success’; 2. ‘belief is shaped by evidence; acceptance need not be shaped by evidence’; 3. ‘belief is context-independent insofar as it is not shaped by an agent’s purposes, but acceptance is often context-dependent and shaped by an agent’s purposes’; 4. ‘belief is subject to an ideal of agglomeration, and acceptance is not regulated by any such ideal’; 5. ‘belief comes in degrees, while acceptance is all or nothing’; 6. ‘belief is not subject to direct voluntary control, while acceptance can be under our direct voluntary control (some holding that acceptance is also a mental action type)’. Buckareff, Andrei, ‘Acceptance Does Not Entail Belief’, International Journal of Philosophical Studies, Vol. 18, Iss. 2, (2010), p. 255. There is some disagreement over certain points on this list – especially 1 and 5. However, as long as at least one of these differences holds there is a genuine distinction to be made. And as long as acceptance is an action one can decide to take it can bridge the gap that I am trying to bridge in this context.

claim that actions can be justified in various ways, along parallel lines to the various ways I’ve claimed we can justify beliefs and emotions.

(1) An action, A, is epistemically justified iff the beliefs connected to that action are justified.

(2) An action, A, is morally justified iff that action is either morally supererogatory, or morally permissible.

(3) An action, A, is pragmatically justified iff in situation S if that action leads to overall better consequences than the non-performance of that action.

As acceptance can be seen as an action, we can see that it can be justified in any of these ways.

Once one accepts a proposition, this acceptance can interact with the other dimensions, allowing this to initiate religious conversion even in the absence (thus far) of belief. Acceptance is sufficient to play a cognitive role in the generation of an emotional response to this acceptance (in much the same way as mere imagination can generate genuine emotional responses). Once we emotionally react to an accepted proposition, what happens next is as described in the interactions between emotion and the other two dimensions. Acceptance can also motivate religious behaviour, as it ‘typically engenders a complex dispositional state’.67

if acceptance were just a momentary act that left no residue, it would have no point.
The point lies precisely in the fact that to accept a proposition is to be prepared to make use of it in reasoning and in guiding one’s behavior.68

Acceptance is thus in a better position to motivate religious behaviour, as it will be easier to explain how it happens that one accepts religious propositions that would justify the behaviour than it would be to explain how one comes to believe them in a rational way. This is because one doesn’t first need sufficient evidence to accept the religious propositions – one only needs to think there might be good reasons for thinking that accepting them might be fruitful. Once a proposition has been accepted,

this is not enough alone, but it does allow the interaction between the dimensions of religious conversion to get moving and ‘it is possible for acceptance to turn into belief as one gets deeper and deeper into the religion one has accepted. Neither the believer nor the accepter is necessarily frozen forever into that stance.’

Acceptance is not something that occurs only one time, and then never again, if it is to lead to a conversion. It will need to be reaffirmed at key points, and will need to be re-enforced by taking action in line with that acceptance. Alston says (but we needn’t restrict the application of this claims to only the Christian religion):

When I come to my thesis that accepting basic Christian doctrines can undergird a full-blown Christian commitment, I don't want to restrict myself to the act of initial adoption. If one “accepted” the doctrines and then promptly forgot all about them, if no further use were made of them or attention paid to them, this clearly would not serve as a foundation for a robust Christian life.

Failing to reaffirm acceptance would not lead to a religious life, but doing so might.

This works well so long as the distinction between belief and acceptance is robust. Clarke thinks, however, that acceptance entails belief, which he calls the ‘entailment thesis’. If the entailment thesis were to hold, then the distinction for this purpose collapses. Clarke’s motivation for the entailment thesis is in part based on an objection to its contrary. Here is a scenario – I measure my table for a tablecloth, and the ruler reads 3 feet, 11 and 7/16 inches long and so this is the length I believe it to be. However, when I come to buy a tablecloth for this table I accept the proposition that my table is 4 feet long. While this example purports to describe a situation where I accept that my table is 4 feet long without believing it, Clarke thinks this is mistaken and cites the plausibility of the example to ‘the vagueness of the concepts of acceptance and belief used in its formulation’. While we can generate an instance of Moore’s paradox by stating ‘The table is four feet long but I believe that it is 3 feet, 11 and 7/16 inches long’, this is not how we would report the state of affairs described

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69 Ibid, p. 18.
70 Ibid, p. 9.
in the example.\textsuperscript{73} We would be unlikely to report our belief in such an exact form, but would happily report our belief as the belief that the table is 4 feet long, thus rendering compatible the second clause of the paradoxical sentence with the first. However, in other circumstances (where precision was paramount) we would not make the assertion that the table is 4 feet long, and so would render the first clause compatible with the first. In general, we are guided by the same considerations in making the assertion as in reporting the belief, and this is how the paradox is avoided, according to Clarke.

The upshot of the reply is that I can assert that I believe that the table is four feet long while in fact believing not precisely this, but that the table is 3 feet, 11 and 7/16 inches long. Buckareff takes to be evident that ‘Clarke has taken speech acts like asserting and mental events like accepting to be more similar than they may really be.’\textsuperscript{74} So my willingness, and the appropriateness of the assertion that I believe that the table is 4 feet long, is not indicative in a strong sense of any fact about the precise belief that I hold. Thus Clarke’s reasoning does not entitle him to the entailment thesis.

While acceptance does not entail belief, a state of acceptance makes the belief more likely to form. By accepting a proposition, one is led onto new lines of enquiry, and becomes open to new kinds of experience, new ways of feeling and acting, and one’s attention is directed towards new things. Additionally, belief may still be considered a preferable state. Emotions arise at the thought of even imaginary things – imagine for a moment that your latest work is considered for a prestigious prize, and note if any emotional reaction is experienced, perhaps stronger the more vividly you imagine it. Imagining extremely positive or negative scenarios may generate stronger emotions, and more quickly. But also notice that this feeling will pass rather quicker than you'd expect if you genuinely believed what you are now merely imagining. If we consider some religious truth it may stir our emotions, but the interaction with belief is important for \textit{sustaining} emotional engagement.

\textsuperscript{73} Buckareff, p. 256.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, p. 257.
4.4. Concluding remarks.

In this chapter I discussed the nature of religious rituals, which are a form of praxis. Having considered both intellectualist and expressivist views, I concluded that neither view can adequately explain rituals, and that an integrated (and Wittgensteinian inspired) view is more robust than either and can capture some pertinent features of religious rituals. I considered a potential objection to my view, which claimed that my view would lead to a kind of subjectivism that would make understanding foreign rituals impossible, which would have negative consequences for our ability to understand and communicate with one another. I argued that this is not a consequence of my view, because genuine rituals (rather than singular ritual-like acts or one-off ritualistic enactments) stem from impulses that are shared features of the human condition, and so where rituals stem from these impulses, they are likely to be understandable by others who share those impulses, and the way to get ‘inside’ the ritual to see which impulses are driving the symbolic actions is to take part, and to immerse oneself in the culture in which they occur.

While this recommendation to take part in rituals is key to understanding them, the mere performance of rituals is not sufficient to bring about a religious conversion. James quotes a journal, which says:

You have been seeking, praying, reforming, laboring, reading, hearing, and meditating, and what have you done by it towards your salvation? Are you any nearer to conversion now than when you first began? Are you any more prepared for heaven, or fitter to appear before the impartial bar of God, than when you first began to seek? “It brought such conviction on me that I was obliged to say that I did not think I was one step nearer than at first, but as much condemned, as much exposed, and as miserable as before.”

This suggests that action alone isn’t sufficient for a conversion, as here the right actions have been enacted but this hasn’t resulted in a conversion. At this point, we have considered three dimensions of religious conversion, so in this chapter I was able to discuss not merely praxis, but also the connections between the dimensions of praxis, belief, and affect. It is through the connection between action and the other dimensions that the fuller picture emerges. Having discussed the connection between emotion and belief in §3.2, in the present chapter I discussed the connection between
emotion and action, and between belief and action. I argued that emotions are both causally and conceptually linked to action. I argued that there is a two way-interaction between belief and action. I then considered an objection to the effect that because belief may lead to action and action may lead to belief, we yet have no way of understanding which would come first, or could start the chain of interactions, and so the process is still unexplained and unjustified. To remedy this, I considered one specific kind of action, which is that of acceptance. I distinguished acceptance from belief, and claimed that one can first accept a proposition for pragmatic or moral reasons, and that this may lead to belief formation at a later point. Acceptance involves both cognitive and non-cognitive components:

The reaction naturally called for by a message from the divine is acceptance. This involves both an intellectual acceptance of its contents – belief that whatever statements it makes are true – and obedience to the commands and exhortations it contains […] faith in this sense means far more than the intellectual assent to certain propositions. It also involves taking up an attitude on the basis of that affirmation and expressing that attitude in action.75

This integration of cognitive and non-cognitive elements has been a recurring theme to emerge from this research, and this will continue in the next chapter, where I offer a general account of conversion based on the conclusions drawn so far.

CHAPTER 5

THE CONVERSION PROCESS

“‘I can become a friend of God here and now if I want to.’” Even as he spoke he was in labor with the new life that was struggling to birth within him. ’

We have seen that religious conversion involves several dimensions, and these have been discussed in turn. I shall begin the present chapter by quoting from an extended first-person account of a religious conversion that illustrates the involvement of all three of these dimensions, with those aspects related to the doxastic dimension emboldened, those related to the affections italicized, and those related to the dimension of praxis underlined:

I thought I saw the Saviour, by faith, in human shape, for about one second in the room, with arms extended, appearing to say to me, Come. The next day I rejoiced with trembling; soon after, my happiness was so great that I said that I wanted to die; this world had no place in my affections, as I knew of, and every day appeared as solemn to me as the Sabbath. I had an ardent desire that all mankind might feel as I did; I wanted to have them all love God supremely. Previous to this time I was very selfish and self-righteous; but now I desired the welfare of all mankind, and could with a feeling heart forgive my worst enemies, and I felt as if I should be willing to bear the scoffs and sneers of any person, and suffer anything for His sake, if I could be the means in the hands of God, of the conversion of one soul. […] One Sabbath, I went to hear the Methodist at the Academy. He spoke of the ushering in of the day of general judgment; and he set it forth in such a solemn and terrible manner as I never heard before. The scene of that day appeared to be taking place, and so awakened were all the powers of my mind that, like Felix, I trembled involuntarily on the bench where I was sitting, though I felt nothing at heart. The next day evening I went to hear him again. […] I will now relate my experience of the power of the Holy Spirit which took place on the same night. Had any person told me previous to this that I could have experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in the manner which I did, I could not have believed it, and should have thought the person deluded that

told me so. [...] I began to be exercised by the Holy Spirit, which began in about five minutes after, in the following manner:— At first, I began to feel my heart beat very quick all on a sudden, which made me at first think that perhaps something is going to ail me, though I was not alarmed, for I felt no pain. My heart increased in its beating, which soon convinced me that it was the Holy Spirit from the effect it had on me. I began to feel exceedingly happy and humble, and such a sense of unworthiness as I never felt before. I could not very well help speaking out, which I did, [...] It took complete possession of my soul, and I am certain that I desired the Lord, while in the midst of it, not to give me any more happiness, for it seemed as if I could not contain what I had got. My heart seemed as if it would burst, but it did not stop until I felt as if I was unutterably full of the love and grace of God. In the mean time while thus exercised, a thought arose in my mind, what can it mean? and all at once, as if to answer it, my memory became exceedingly clear, and it appeared to me just as if the New Testament was placed open before me, eighth chapter of Romans, and as light as if some candle lighted was held for me to read the 26th and 27th verses of that chapter, and I read these words: ‘The Spirit helpeth our infirmities with groanings which cannot be uttered.’ [...] After this, with difficulty I got to sleep; and when I awoke in the morning my first thoughts were: What has become of my happiness? and, feeling a degree of it in my heart, I asked for more, which was given to me as quick as thought. [...] I went downstairs feeling as solemn as if I had lost all my friends, and thinking with myself, that I would not let my parents know it until I had first looked into the Testament. I went directly to the shelf and looked into it, at the eighth of Romans, and every verse seemed to almost speak and to confirm it to be truly the Word of God, and as if my feelings corresponded with the meaning of the word. I then told my parents of it, and told them that I thought that they must see that when I spoke, that it was not my own voice, for it appeared so to me. My speech seemed entirely under the control of the Spirit within me; I do not mean that the words which I spoke were not my own, for they were. I thought that I was influenced similar to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost (with the exception of having power to give it to others, and doing what they did). After breakfast I went round to converse with my neighbors on religion, which I could not have been hired to have done before this, and at their request I prayed with them, though I had never prayed in public before. I now feel as if I had discharged my duty by telling the truth, and hope by the blessing of God, it may do some good to all who shall read it. He has
fulfilled his promise in sending the Holy Spirit down into our hearts, or mine at least, and I now defy all the Deists and Atheists in the world to shake my faith in Christ.²

I now propose (in §5.1) to offer a concise account of the conversion process by piecing together these aspects. I shall then (in §5.2) explore the role of understanding in religious conversion, which I argue involves an integrated appreciation of the significance of all three dimensions. In the penultimate section (§5.3) I will explore an important implication of the research so far undertaken. I claim that my research leaves room for the voluntariness of each aspect of religious conversion in a sense sufficient for moral responsibility. Thus, it is sometimes possible to choose to undergo a conversion to a sufficient extent to make us morally responsible for whether or not we do. We can therefore see religious conversion as a normative issue, and it becomes relevant to ask whether one should convert. Finally I consider the ethical status of religious conversion (in §5.4).

5.1. The conversion process as a spiral.

We have seen that there is no logical priority between the three dimensions of religious conversion, as they are intrinsically linked.³ According to Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham and Pitcher, these dimensions are related as follows:

in order to be committed to God, one must believe in Him, and commitment to God influences religious behavior. On the other hand, in order to feel committed to a church or organization, one must believe it to be a good and viable organization, and commitment to the organization influences participation and acceptance of the behavioral norms and expectations of the organization.⁴

There is also no strict or universal temporal priority between these three dimensions. Sometimes one dimension will be temporally prior and other times a different dimension will be prior. Wynn draws on Plantinga, who claims that neither cognition nor affection is prior, as:

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² Quoted in James, Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 188-92.
³ In §§3.2 and 4.2.
⁴ Cornwall, Albrecht, Cunningham and Pitcher, p. 228.
The structure of will and intellect here is perhaps a spiral, dialectical process: heightened affections enable us to see more of God’s beauty and glory; being able to see more of God’s beauty and glory and majesty in turn leads to heightened affections; there are certain things you won’t know unless you love, have the right affections; there are certain affections you won’t have without perceiving some of God’s moral qualities.\(^5\)

Rather than a single dimension having priority overall, there are many interactions. This may seem unsatisfying, but ‘the messiness is to some extent intrinsic to the subject matter: to speak in general terms, religions depends on discursive thought and also on feeling; and to speak of particular cases, it is sometimes thought which comes first, sometimes feeling, and sometimes neither.’\(^6\) Importantly, behaviour may also come first on some occasions.

While there is not a universal priority either in terms of significance or temporality of a single dimension, it is an empirical observation than in a given conversion, there may be one dimension that shifts first, or that dominates. This may be different for different individuals. One single change – either a belief, an action, or a feeling, can act as a ‘tipping point’ and can instigate large and widespread changes in the manner of a butterfly effect. This aligns well with accounts of conversion that have been documented. For example, one person describes a conversion that they claim occurred while they read something of religious significance:

> Immediately with the termination of this sentence, all darkness of doubt were dispersed, as if by a light of peace flooding into my heart.\(^7\)

Tipping points trigger a flurry of other changes, so that this particular cluster of changes is more noticeable, apparent, or cumulatively creates a more evident effect on the subject. However, nothing occurs in isolation – any single dimension that undergoes a shift will have implications for others that are related to it more or less directly. Hence it may happen that one gestalt switch can affect a wide network of

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\(^6\) Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding*, pp. 147.

\(^7\) Augustine, *Confessions*, p.225.
associated things. Where this doesn’t occur, what we have is not really a conversion, for conversion is widespread and sustained.

Depending on the order in which these things happen to occur, and which dimension predominates in terms of initiating the spirals, we might broadly classify the conversion differently. I offer the following typology:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Sequence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Intellectual-Pragmatic</td>
<td>Belief → Behaviour → Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Intellectual-Revelatory</td>
<td>Belief → Emotion → Behaviour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3) Pascalian-Emotive</td>
<td>Behaviour → Emotion → Belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4) Pascalian-Pragmatic</td>
<td>Behaviour → Belief → Emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(5) Emotive-Expressive</td>
<td>Emotion → Behaviour → Belief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(6) Emotive-Self-deceptive</td>
<td>Emotion → Belief → Behaviour</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In (1) the initial change, or ‘trigger’, will be the acquisition of a new belief, which will motivate some kind of religious behaviour, to which there will be an emotional response. From here, (and this applies to all types) any further series of changes may occur. In (2) the initially formed belief will stimulate an emotional response, which will motivate religious behaviour. In (3) some kind of religious participation will trigger an emotional response, which will lead to the formation of religious belief, while in (4) the religious participation itself leads directly to the formation of religious belief, which in turn stimulates an emotional response. In (5) a strong emotional experience (possibly a religious experience or possibly an aesthetic reaction to nature or to religious artefacts, architecture, texts, or symbols) leads to the urge to participate in religious behaviour which in turn leads to the formation of religious beliefs. Finally, in (6) a similar emotional experience leads to or influences the formation of a religious belief, which in turn motivates religious behaviour.

Ultimately, any genuine conversion is unlikely to be of only one type. We can think of any of the trios above as a micro-spiral, but the conversion process is a spiral comprised of many micro-spirals. We might usefully categorise a conversion by the typology I offered where one particular micro-spiral repeats most often, or where one particular micro spiral stands out in extremity (perhaps by being the first micro-spiral in a very sudden or dramatic conversion). However, we should expect that there are aspects of all or many of these types in an individual’s conversion process. In short,
the dimensions are interrelated and conversion happens by a spiralling re-enforcement between them.

Without this spiral to inculcate new behavioural and affective dispositions and new beliefs, (that is, if a single change occurs in a vacuum), either a conversion will not take place (old patterns will reign), or it will be very short lived – one will, in James’ words, ‘backslide’:

religious virtues, including the relevant emotional dispositions, would be fragile. They would be susceptible to vicissitudes as they are elsewhere, or they would remain in place whilst their expression is blocked off by depression, apathy, weakness, accidie, sloth, tiredness, and so on, so that one’s religious life goes cold on one.8

This is supported by the fact that some conversions are fairly short lived and others are life-long. Without belief or acceptance there will be insufficient momentum for one’s emotions, and insufficient motivation for one’s behaviour on a continued basis. If a conversion experience is not followed by participation in religious activities then the affect of the experience may dwindle and fail to be integrated into the life of the almost-convert. If, on the other hand, actions are performed of a religious nature following a conversion, this will reinforce the triggering experience and will be likely to trigger further changes. For example, if a conversion is followed by church attendance, there will often be emotive music, beautiful icons, and many symbols that tie into a complex network of associations that allow them to tap into the emotions felt on other occasions when those symbols have been present. Once I’ve had a strongly positive religious experience involving a particular symbol or icon, future exposure to religious icons will elicit positive feelings too. This may trigger deeper feelings once personal connections are made within the religious community of that church, like feelings of acceptance, belonging, or even family. Post conversion, objects that before had no effect, or even a negative effect, will be comforting, inspiring, or in other ways positive, so attending church increases exposure to these and consolidates the associations and strengthens the significance for the convert.

This model, by integrating praxis along with affective and cognitive components, augments that of Wynn, who claims that ‘sometimes, conceptually

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inarticulate feelings may lead the way and then be deepened by concepts and the working of the imagination; and sometimes, discursive thoughts may lead the way, and then be extended by feeling. We might wonder if these two models can interact, so that some kinds of religious understanding arise from the reciprocal influence of these two movements’. The integration between these three aspects leads to what can be called ‘religious understanding’, to which I now turn.

5.2. The role of understanding.

Understanding is a combination of dimensions, and can be seen as a state reached when there is harmonious integration of dimensions working together, so that things are believed, felt and lived. When one has a religious conversion, one has a new understanding of the world, its nature, and our place in it. Understanding a proposition does not necessarily involve believing it (we can understand a proposition that we accept but don’t believe, or that we deny). However, accepting or believing a proposition probably presupposes that one understands at least in the most basic sense. There are various things that ‘understanding’ might mean:

Understanding-SM: Comprehending the semantic meaning of a proposition.
Understanding-PM: Comprehending the pragmatic meaning of an utterance.
Understanding-C: Comprehending the connection between a proposition or utterance and a state of affairs.
Understanding-WR: Comprehending the connection between a wide range propositions or utterances, or between various states of affairs.

To illustrate the difference between these types of understanding, take some examples. First, take an utterance of: ‘Please stand up’. I would understand this semantically in virtue of being familiar with the definition of each word involved and with the grammatical structure of these words. I might understand it pragmatically but not semantically if I can gather the desired result of the command despite not knowing the meaning of the words, for example, a non-English speaker might be said to have understood the command, in virtue of the fact that he heard the command and

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followed it, even if he did so because the tonality allowed him to infer it was a command and everyone around him stood up. We might call the combination of both of these types of understanding linguistic understanding. Now take the proposition ‘God exists’. One understands this semantically if we know what the words mean, and pragmatically if we know what the expression is being used to do, and linguistically if we understand it in both of these ways. Linguistic understanding may well shift in a religious conversion for certain religious language, so that the linguistic meanings given to certain religious terms are different in various ways, ways which will vary with the religious tradition one converts to.

The other two types of understanding involve significance. We understand a proposition like ‘it is raining’ if we get that it is making an assertion about the world, and we understand-WR it if we get this, but also grasp its implications for our wider belief-set about the world, for instance that the ground will get wet and that there are clouds in the sky, and suchlike. We understand the significance of a proposition when we see it in its relation to other things, and as there can be almost limitless relations between a proposition and other things one can have progressively deeper and deeper understanding with each contemplation of new connections. A weatherman’s understanding of the proposition that it is raining is likely (unless you have a background in meteorology yourself) to be more extensive than yours or mine. For most people, the point at which further contemplation is no longer a useful way to spend time will occur before all connections have been explored, for some connections will be less significant or connect in more tenuous or less relevant ways. Likewise, those who spend time and effort contemplating religiosity (whether or not they have religious beliefs, feelings, or behaviours) are likely to have a deeper understanding of religion and religiosity than those who don’t. We may think of Mary, the star of the thought experiment in which we are asked to consider whether if Mary has spent her life in a black and white room studying everything about the nature of colour, she would gain new knowledge if she were to see colour for the first time. Depending on our response to this, we may see the difference between a student of religion and a participant in a religious life differently, or not. I would argue that there would be a difference in understanding.

A difference in understanding involves a different arrangement of beliefs, or of the connections and relations between beliefs. In §2.3, we saw that intellectual arguments to religious conclusions are rarely convincing as they stand, even if they appear valid. In fact, using mere rational deliberation is a shaky guide, ‘because however much reason may try to weigh the various issues which seem relevant in choices of love, friendship, career, or any other life commitment, it may not see the real import of the information with which it is presented.’ Emotion is a missing element, for instance, ‘in the case of musical appreciation, feeling is able to take us beyond a certain sensory input so as to pick out a reality that has yet to be fully revealed in sensory terms; and analogously, in the case of God, feeling is able to take us beyond a certain doxastic input, so as to relate us to a reality that has yet to be fully understood in doxastic terms.’ So it is not merely a certain arrangement of beliefs that comprise understanding; emotions are necessary for full understanding. Consider this example offered by Wynn:

In crucial cases… repugnance is the emotional expression of a deep wisdom, beyond reason’s power fully to articulate it. Can anyone really give an argument fully adequate to the horror which is father-daughter incest (even with consent), or … mutilating a corpse, or eating human flesh, or even just (just!) raping or murdering another human being?’ [Kass, Leon, ‘The Wisdom of Repugnance’, New Republic, Vol. 216, Iss. 22, (Feb., 1997). Kass’s italics.] In other words, the full value significance of these various activities is not discernible from the standpoint of discursive reason alone; the real meaning of such activities (the ‘pattern’ that is presented by the ‘facts’) is evident in, and only in, the affectively toned perception that is afforded in the response of repugnance.

This forcefully presents the involvement of both the cognitive aspect of belief in the wrongness of these things, and the felt experience of the wrongness of these things. If you truly understand that murder is repugnant, I would expect you to actually experience the emotion of repugnance. Sometimes there is a moral sense in which a feature of a situation or a quality of a person should be registered with a ‘resonance or

11 Wynn, Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding, p. 185.
12 Ibid, p. 146.
13 Wynn, Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding, p. 193.
importance that only emotional involvement can sustain’.  

Therefore belief and emotions work together to lead to understanding, and religious conversion involves a shift, or a deepening of understanding of the religious sphere. According to Starkey, the reason that emotion can enable full understanding is that emotions affect our focus and the import of aspects of our experience, so our awareness of certain things is actually different when we are in different emotional states:

an accompanying emotion may change the experience or state of awareness of the event itself and as a result of this produce an understanding of the event that is not possible without the emotion.

If you broke the news to someone you know that their loved one has died, you may reasonably expect them to linguistically understand you, but unless they have some emotional reaction, you may reasonably suspect that they don’t yet understand the significance of what you’ve said. In the absence of grief, we must either say that they don’t really understand what has happened, or perhaps that they didn’t really love them. This is true even if they are able to assert the proposition that their loved one is dead. They would merely have what James called ‘a cold and neutral state of intellectual perception.’

Merely believing that a loved one has died, while this may involve linguistic understanding, and may involve to a certain extent understanding the significance, falls short of a full understanding. The suggestion here is that this link is conceptual – it makes no sense to talk of someone having loved a person for whom they feel no grief when they die. In this way, we might talk of that feeling of grief being a criterion of the value that the beloved had for the mourner.

However, as we have seen in exploring the close interconnectedness of beliefs and emotions with action, I claim we need to supplement the account of understanding given so far. In addition to emotion, there is also a behavioural component that is necessary for full understanding. If you understand the repugnant nature of murder, I would reasonably expect you firstly, not to commit it, secondly, to recoil or intervene if you were witness to it, and also, to act in ways compatible with

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15 Starkey, p. 430.

this understanding.\textsuperscript{17} If cognitive states were sufficient for understanding, including understanding the value that certain things have, many of our feelings and behaviours would be inexplicable. For instance, in \textit{The Odyssey}, Odysseus chooses to leave a peaceful life of contentment and ‘perfection’ with Calypso, for the outwardly inferior Penelope. His feelings for Penelope and his actions in choosing her demonstrate that \textit{beliefs} about her value are not sufficient for his \textit{understanding} of her value. In loving Penelope over Calypso:

[Odysseus] is also choosing the kind of life in which the emotions can help to constitute certain values. […] the value which Penelope holds for him is not, it seems, a matter of her outward qualities establishing her superiority over other women: as he says to Calypso, she is ‘far beneath you in form and stature’. […] The value of Penelope for Odysseus is in part constituted by his felt attachment to her: his feelings mark her out as special in his life, and mean that she cannot easily be replaced.\textsuperscript{18}

We have already seen the link between emotions and full understanding, which is also exemplified in this story, for his understanding of Penelope’s worth is \textit{not} intellectual, but feeling based. However, the story would make no narrative sense should we clearly see that he believes and feels the worth of Penelope as more significant to him than Calypso, and yet did \textit{not} choose her. If his actions were unloving towards Penelope, if he did not spend his time with her instead of Calypso, and if he instead showed his affections to Calypso, this would make no sense – we would think that he didn’t really understand after all. Due to the close links between \textit{action} and emotion and belief, embodied participation in certain activities will also contribute to full understanding, one that is not possible to achieve from an armchair. Thus we may add a final category to the typology of understanding, which we will call \textit{full} understanding, which involves the previous forms of understanding but also a felt and lived response that is in line with this.

When we see understanding in the way outlined, we can see that understanding is something that we don’t gain all at once in a moment of apprehension, but is something that deepens and develops. There is often a need for

\textsuperscript{17} While there may be instances where a person might both find murder repugnant, and intentionally kill a person, this is likely to occur only in quite special circumstances, and I’d venture that we can say that where repugnance is the only emotional influence, the act of murder would be a marker of insanity.

\textsuperscript{18} Wynn, \textit{Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding}, p. 60.
appreciation of context, which can often only come once a pattern or series of events has been established. This implication is that understanding cannot be achieved immediately. There can of course be key moments. These can be key moments of the ‘eureka’ type, where something clicks into place and a new belief changes the cognitive landscape in a significant way. These can also be of the affective type, where a strongly emotional (perhaps religious) experience causes a swift shift. This could also be of a practical type, where a significant behavioural event takes place, for example one ceases to be a spectator and begins actually to participate in a ritual or sacrament.

Full understanding is gained as a result of changes involving belief, emotion, and action, but depends not merely on these changes, but on the links between them, and the way they are ordered in relation to one another. Often full understanding comes not at the moment of a strong emotion or important event or new belief forming, but rather, once these have been reflected on and integrated into the life of the individual. Conversion involves a reflective reordering of the individual’s outlook, so that the changes undergone are incorporated into a new interpretative narrative of the subject’s life. Once the narrative of one’s life changes, one is likely to interpret future events, feelings, and beliefs in that new light, and this is where sustained change becomes possible, which is what genuine conversion looks like.

One thing that tends to happen after a conversion is a retelling of one’s life story in terms of the transformative experience. One will re-interpret and attribute new significance to past life events in a way that makes sense in the new framework one has adopted. For example, I may have an encounter with a loved one that I don’t take to be significant at the time. However, if my beloved later dies, this same event will take on a new significance, that of ‘the last time I saw him’. Suddenly a parting gesture or phrase that held little meaning will gain importance for me – a harsh word that I may have ignored may now result in a heavy guilt, while a small kind word may become deeply comforting. This can transform the memory we have of the event, and how we relate it to other events. Until some later insight or event has occurred, (for example until after we are aware of the death of a loved one) we are simply unable to attribute the significance to that event that comes after that insight (for example the significance of being the last time the loved one was seen.) Some interpretations are only available from the perspective of hindsight – the significance of certain events can only be grasped retrospectively. This is exactly what we would expect given that
some emotions are to be understood not as states that occur at moments, but as processes that perdure.

Conversion involves giving meaning (or new meaning) to one’s life, and emotions ‘may have a part to play in giving or recognising structure and meaning in human life.’ The process can form a recognisable pattern, as in the case of grief, which involves different aspects that can occur in stages. Wittgenstein says that ‘“Grief” describes a pattern which recurs, with different variations, in the weave of our life’. According to Goldie, ‘[t]he pattern has certain features. It includes characteristic thoughts, judgments, feelings, imaginings, actions, expressive actions, habitual actions, and much else besides, unfolding over time, but none of which is essential at any particular time.’ This is sometimes formalised within a religious tradition and plays an important part in a convert publicly demonstrating commitment to the new religion:

A common method for publicly displaying commitment is the personal testimony, a narrative of the convert’s life before and after conversion. The testimony serves to reconstruct biographical information, integrating the convert’s and religious community’s story.

Having explored these crucial elements in the conversion process, I now turn to the question of the ethics of religious conversion, and to what extent conversion is a voluntary process.

5.3. The ethics of religious conversion.

In this section I evaluate the ethical status of religious conversion. I take it that actions and events are ethically evaluable in terms of being morally good (or permissible), or morally bad, and that the agents performing those actions or partaking in those events are evaluated as morally praiseworthy or blameworthy respectively. Where praise and blame are appropriate, so too are responsive acts of reward and punishment. When

asking whether some aspect of religious conversion is subject to ethical evaluation we are asking whether it might be morally bad or morally good (or permissible), and whether a person could be blameworthy or praiseworthy for their conversion, or lack thereof. The implications of the answer to this question are manifold, and have consequences for our view of our own religiosity and whether or not we are living good lives in this regard, as well as for how we understand the role of religion in the communities in which we live, not to mention more specific matters like the interpretation of scripture on the topics of salvation and damnation.

I argue that whether religious conversion can be reasonably evaluated for its ethical status depends on whether or not it is voluntary. The argument is:

(P1): An agent P is ethically evaluable for an act/event x insofar as it is legitimate to praise or blame P in respect to x.

(P2): It is legitimate to praise or blame P in respect to x only if P is responsible for x.\(^{23}\)

(P3): An agent P is responsible for act/event x iff P performs x voluntarily.

∴ (C4): An agent P is ethically evaluable for an act/event x only if P performs x voluntarily.\(^{24}\)

So if we are to hold someone morally accountable for, and respond with praise and blame for a religious conversion, we are doing so legitimately only if that person has done so voluntarily. I now address the question of whether religious conversion can be voluntary.

5.3.1. The voluntariness of religious conversion.

This section undertakes the task of arguing that religious conversion can be voluntary. James envisages the possibility of a voluntary conversion, when he discusses conversions of the volitional type. Volitional conversions are both conscious and voluntary, are usually gradual, and consist in ‘the building up, piece by piece, of a

\(^{23}\) This could be shortened to one premise: An agent P is ethically evaluable for an act/event x only if P is responsible for x.

new set of moral and spiritual habits.’ My approach is to consider in turn each of the dimensions of religious conversion and ask how far each of them involves voluntary elements. With regard to the dimension of praxis, I claim that the behaviour we adopt is able to be voluntary and so we can be responsible for the relevant behaviour. With regard to the doxastic dimension I argue that forming religious beliefs is indirectly voluntary, meaning that while I may not be able to form a belief at will, I can choose to undertake activities that will make it more likely that such and such a belief will form. This level of voluntariness is sufficient for moral responsibility. Finally, with regard to the affective dimension of conversion, I shall offer an argument that claims that we can also be responsible for our emotions.

If something is done voluntarily it is done as the result of choosing, deciding, intending or meaning to do it. If I intend to raise my arm and then successfully do so as a result of this intention, I raised my arm voluntarily. If I choose to eat fish for dinner and then order the fish as a result of this choice, I did so voluntarily. According to Aristotle, actions that are done under compelling conditions but are nevertheless enacted without force are still voluntary. Thus, if it turned out that Hitler only conducted himself the way he did because he was given a choice between that and something one hundred times worse, having made the choice that he did without external force, he would have still done so voluntarily.

Involuntary actions can be of different kinds. Sometimes one might fail to carry out something that one intended, chose, or meant to carry out. For example, I may intend to raise my arm, attempt to do so, and fail because my arm is tied to a chair. In cases like this where there is some form of external compulsion we call the resulting act/event involuntary. If I am forced into some relevant act, for example, if I am physically dragged into a church, I am not responsible for this. We might view brainwashing as a kind of psychological force, in which case we could see people who convert as a result of indoctrination by brainwashing techniques as having done so involuntarily.

Another case seems less straightforward: I may choose to eat fish because it is the healthy option, but when the waiter arrives and asks for my order my will might crumble and I may order a burger instead. This is an example of what Aristotle calls akrasia (weakness of will). However, in this and similar cases we might say that I did

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25 James, p. 204.
not fully intend to choose the fish at the crucial moment, and if my first intention to order fish was genuine at all, then we must say that my mind changed at some point between then and the moment that I ordered the burger. Therefore the act of ordering a burger was under my voluntary control as it was a product of my intention at the time I ordered it. In cases where someone first intends to, for instance, attend church, but then suffers from akrasia and stays in bed instead, they are responsible for their non-attendance. If someone is aware that many people believe in God, and wants to look into this further to see if this is true, but instead spends their time on other things, they are responsible.

Under conditions where I do not know what it is that I am doing, I am acting voluntarily if my ignorance is culpable. Ignorance is culpable whenever I could have easily found out, and should have tried to find out the fact that I am ignorant of. For example, if I were to administer an antibiotic to my friend who is allergic to penicillin because I didn’t read the label of the medication, I am responsible for the resulting allergic response, because I should have read the description on the label and could easily have done so. There are instances where our ignorance is inculpable. If for example I collect a safe antibiotic from a pharmacy, read the label, and administer a medicine according to the instructions, I would not be responsible if this has an adverse effect because a pharmacy error meant that penicillin was inside the mislabelled container. Here my ignorance would not be culpable because I could not reasonably have been expected to know that, nor would it have been reasonable for me to carry out tests on the medication or checks on the pharmacist. Part of what it means to be ignorant in relation to a certain action is to fail to recognise some of the descriptions that your actions fall under. In the current example, this might be to fail to recognise that your action falls under the description: ‘administer penicillin’. In a religious example, it might be that a person is aware that his action falls under the description ‘attends church’ but is unaware that his action falls under the description ‘initiates religious conversion’. If one is aware of a religion but too lazy to read a religious text, talk about it, or engage in any religious practices, they are culpably ignorant, and may be held responsible for not converting. If on the other hand someone grows up in a community where no-one is religious, there is no access to outside communities that are religious, there are no materials or influences which would bring the existence of religion to this person’s attention, then this person would
be inculpably ignorant of the possibility of a religious life and as a result could not be held responsible for not converting.

Some initial implications of this account of moral responsibility are as follows. If (assuming it is possible, which has yet to be shown) someone chooses, decides, intends, or means to convert, and then does so as a result of this, then they converted voluntarily. However, there are what we might call ‘excusing conditions’ which are conditions that exempt an agent from, or reduce responsibility. These include coercion or force, brainwashing, being under the age where one can exercise rational choice, or where one is inculpably ignorant and doesn’t fully realise what one is doing.

To determine whether one can really be responsible for a religious conversion, we need to ask whether the elements involved in a religious conversion are or can be voluntary. In the following sections, I will consider in turn whether each of the dimensions of religious conversion, namely belief, behaviour, and emotion, can be voluntary. If all three dimensions can be voluntary, I shall take this as good support for the conclusion that religious conversion can be voluntary. However, I argue that there will also be support for this conclusion if even one of the dimensions can be established to be voluntary. I will make a distinction between direct and indirect voluntariness, and show that because the dimensions are interdependent in the way that my account has sketched, as long as at least one dimensions is directly voluntary, this can furnish the other dimensions with indirect voluntariness.

5.3.2. The voluntariness and ethics of behaviour and of belief.

The view that beliefs are not subject to voluntary control is called ‘doxastic involuntarism’ and this claims that forming religious beliefs can only occur involuntarily. On this alternative we do not have direct control over our beliefs, so one cannot, with an ‘inner mental straining or grunt of cognitive effort’, bring about the formation of religious beliefs. Doxastic involuntarism has an unwelcome consequence for traditions that posit a morally perfect God. Namely, if we assume doxastic involuntarism, an inconsistency arises for traditions where creedal assent is necessary for conversion, and conversion is necessary for salvation. The theological assumptions are that there is a perfectly good God, who awards salvation and

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damnation where this is morally appropriate. The non-theological assumption is that reward (salvation) and punishment (damnation) are only morally appropriate where the subject is responsible for what is being rewarded or punished. If doxastic involuntarism is true, ‘there can be people who cannot believe the salvation-relevant propositions’. Reasoning from the contrapositive of the maxim that ‘ought implies can’, Speak takes this to show that there can be people who do not have a moral obligation to believe the requisite doctrines, and so a perfectly good God could not punish them for this. Moreover, those who do believe the relevant propositions would likewise not be responsible for their belief, so God would be equally unable to reward these people with salvation while at the same time being perfectly good. Therefore one must dispense with at least one of the aforementioned assumptions and conclude either that one of the creedal propositions is false (which would undermine any religion to which they are necessary), or that doxastic involuntarism is false, or that the connection between voluntariness, responsibility, and praise/blame and reward/punishment are not as they have been expounded so far.

The opposing position is called ‘doxastic voluntarism’. If doxastic voluntarism is true, then our religious beliefs could be formed voluntarily, which would mean that someone could choose or decide to form a religious belief and could likewise choose not to and could resist forming the belief. On this view, one would be responsible for the beliefs that they hold, and so responsible for the religious beliefs they form as part of a conversion. Doxastic voluntarism is the position implicitly assumed in the New Testament which ‘is full of injunctions to believe, with the implication that this is a meritorious thing to do— which in turn implies it depends at least partly on the will.’ It is also implicit in our use of certain expressions, for example ‘I refuse to believe it’. Cottingham points out that:

we plainly do have, uniquely among our fellow creatures on this planet, the power to stand back from (given subsets of) the beliefs we ‘find’ ourselves having, and to

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28 If Clifford’s principle is right, then not only would a good God not be able to punish an atheist for not believing, it would actually be wrong for an atheist to believe propositions unless they had sufficient evidence for them. A good God would therefore need to praise these atheists, and moreover, to blame any theist who had the ‘right’ beliefs but that were formed not to mention those theists on insufficient evidence.
30 Although not in others, for example ‘seeing is believing’.
inquire whether they are justified, with a view to modifying them in the light of further evidence or comparison with other parts of our belief system.\textsuperscript{31}

This fact seems to suggest that whatever might bring it about that we come to have a certain belief (and even if this process happens without us deciding, or even being aware of it) we \textit{do} have a certain amount of choice.

However, there is something highly unintuitive about the idea that we can simply decide to believe something. James asks: ‘Does it not seem preposterous on the very face of it to talk of our opinions being modifiable at will?’\textsuperscript{32} If we experiment with this ourselves we find that there are limits to our ability to form beliefs, and mere willing is not sufficient to bring about a belief. Look out of your window now, and try to believe that you are looking out at a cratered landscape on planet Mars. No matter how much you \textit{try} (or what the stakes), the belief that you are on Mars \textit{will} elude you. If it doesn’t, this is evidence not for doxastic voluntarism, but for a diagnosis that something is wrong with your belief forming mechanisms, as we think that beliefs need to be connected to reality in some suitable way, and the decision to believe is not a suitable way. Your inability to form this belief must show either that you are not really willing it, or that our beliefs do not respond to the will in the way that voluntarism seems to say. While it might be plausible to think that we weren’t \textit{really} willing to believe that you are on Mars, I’m sure you can think of a situation (or potential reward) that would motivate you more strongly, but even in very clear cases where we \textit{strongly} desire to believe something, it is still not clear we could bring the belief about by a ‘grunt of cognitive effort’.\textsuperscript{33} Instead, our experience is of belief formation just happening to us, irresistibly: ‘I do not, as it were, actively decide to perceive, or to believe, this or that; rather, the mechanisms of the mind do it for me.’\textsuperscript{34} The kind of voluntarism sketched here is therefore highly implausible in light of our experience of belief formation.

Given that the simple voluntarism claim cannot be reconciled with our inability to bring about beliefs at will, just like that, if we want to maintain a voluntarist position it will be necessary to qualify the simple claim in order to find a more plausible version. We can do this by utilising a distinction between things that

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{32} James, ‘The Will to Believe’, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{33} Cottingham, ‘Descartes and the Voluntariness of Belief’, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 3.
are directly voluntary, and things that are indirectly voluntary. Things that are directly voluntary are things I can do without needing to perform any intermediary voluntarily action, so my will can act on that thing directly. I cannot directly control my heart rate. That is, I cannot decide for it to go faster or slower and have it respond to this will. However, I can slightly slow my heart rate by voluntarily staying still and voluntarily slowing my breathing rate, and I can increase it by voluntarily physically exerting myself. My will has not acted directly on my heart muscle in the way it might act on my arm muscle (which I can intentionally lift without having to perform a voluntary intermediate act). Nevertheless, I did act in a voluntary way that had the known and intended result that my heart rate slowed. In this case it is (arguably) legitimate to claim that I have voluntarily slowed my heart, in the indirect sense. However, most of the time, the heart rate is still involuntary. So rather than two options, ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’, I propose that there are three:

Directly voluntary: If an action, A, occurs as a direct response to the will, then A is directly voluntary.

Involuntary: If an action, A, is not a direct response to the will, and has not been brought about as the intended consequence of any other action that is directly voluntary, then A is involuntary.

Indirectly voluntary: If an action, A, can be brought about by another action, B, where A is an intended consequence of B, and where B is directly voluntary, then A is indirectly voluntary. If B is also indirectly voluntary, but is the consequence of another action, C, where C is directly voluntary and A is an intended consequence of C, then A is indirectly voluntary. This chain can be extended to any length as long as it culminates in a directly voluntary action, and

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35 Having said this, there are reports that some yogis have been able to slow their heart rate by the powers of their concentration and attention alone, almost to a stop, and then can increase it again at will. This occurrence, if genuine, doesn’t undermine my general point that for most people, heart rate is not under voluntary control in the direct sense.

36 Although there may be other involuntary intermediaries involved on a biological level, this does not affect the conclusion here as long as we are aware of the fact that the voluntary act will have the consequence of effecting the slow in heart rate.
as long as A is an intended consequence of the directly voluntary action.

In §2.3 I wrote that that there are various routes to belief formation, and one such source is through having certain experiences, which can be sought out by behaving in certain ways. I also argued in §4.2 that engaging in certain behaviour leads to belief formation too. Pascal’s interlocutor in Pensées asks ‘I am not released, and am so made that I cannot believe. What, then, would you have me do?’ His reply is that one should act in the ways that religious people do, to act as though they do believe, and by participating in religious activities like going to church, taking holy water, and having masses said, to bring about the desired belief:

You would like to attain faith and do not know the way; you would like to cure yourself of unbelief and ask the remedy for it. Learn of those who have been bound like you, and who now stake all their possessions. These are people who know the way which you would follow, and who are cured of an ill of which you would be cured. Follow the way by which they began; by acting as if they believed, taking the holy water, having masses said, etc.

Pascal thus prescribes religious practice for those who think it would be in their interest to believe in God, but nonetheless find themselves unable to bring about the belief simply by an act of will, which implies that it is in their power is to engage in activities that make belief formation more likely.

If behaviour is voluntary, then the beliefs that form as a result of the experiences the behaviour leads us to have will be indirectly voluntary. Behaviour is widely held to be voluntary whenever it is free from external constraint. So most of the things I do, will count as voluntary, unless they are brought about by the agency of another person, (they physically restrain me) by the laws of nature (I fall downwards) or by an unconscious mechanism (my heart beats). One objection to this would arise on the assumption that the universe is determined by the state of the present moment plus the laws of nature. This kind of determinism threatens to undermine the notion of voluntariness completely. Whether this determinist thesis is correct or not is beyond

37 Pascal, Pensées, p. 233.
38 Ibid.
the scope of this work, and while cutting edge physics seems to favour the thesis that there is room on a quantum level for ‘chaos’ and that therefore the determinist is wrong, this cannot be deemed conclusive. \textsuperscript{39} However, if we assume that determinism is correct, does this imply that there is no meaningful application for the term ‘voluntary’? I think that it would be both an unnecessary and unwelcome result if determinism led to the more radical claim that we should embark on a wide scale revision of our language to remove all talk of ‘freedom’, ‘choice’, and ‘voluntariness’, and by extension most moral discourse, and much else besides. Even if determinism is true, these terms distinguish markedly different things – even if all action is involuntary in some sense, there is still a relevant difference between an action that I seem to do voluntarily, and one that I am forced into by another agent. I will therefore continue to use these terms and assume that they have moral relevance (whatever that consists in at the meta-ethical level) whether or not determinism is actually true. Given that behaviour can count as voluntary, and can lead to belief formation, we can now say that some beliefs can indirectly voluntarily be formed.

This is not to say that all beliefs are formed indirectly voluntarily – some beliefs will still form automatically and so will count as involuntary. Yet, those automatic beliefs could be influenced by our behaviour. For instance, while an atheist may not be able to believe other than he does under his current circumstances, he could seek further evidence that might lead to his belief. The role of the will in this case concerns ‘what Descartes called the directio ingenii—the voluntary and autonomous decision to direct the mind in ways which will allow its natural rational powers to operate properly and productively.’\textsuperscript{40} Thus, while we can only form the belief that it is not raining (and not that it is) when we look outside and see a sunny dry day, we can refuse to look out of the window, research weather data to find out the probability that it is raining at this time of year, and canvass for testimony from those who think that it is raining. This would have more chance of bringing about the formation of the belief that it is raining than merely intending to form it while gazing at the clear blue sky would. While I cannot possibly form a belief about who was King of England in 1200 AD under my current circumstances, if I decided to I could look for information


concerning this fact, and then I might come to form a belief on the matter. While we have control over what we focus on, which propositions we keep in mind, and what evidence we seek, we do have some form of control over the beliefs that resultantly form.\textsuperscript{41} Williams argues that this picture would not count as deciding to believe, but simply deciding to expose oneself to evidence that may in turn ‘by a route’ lead one to believe something, which is true, but need not count against one’s responsibility for the result.\textsuperscript{42} Therefore, ‘the problem is not that people choose to hold beliefs to which they know they are not entitled - choosing to believe against reason - but that they choose not to (or do not choose to) submit themselves to the conditions in which otherwise cherished beliefs might be challenged.’\textsuperscript{43}

So far I have concluded that belief formation is indirectly voluntary if behaviour leading to belief formation is voluntary, and that such behaviour can be voluntary. Therefore whenever it is under our voluntary control to act in ways that would bring about the beliefs involved in religious conversion, these beliefs are indirectly voluntary. As long as indirect voluntariness is sufficient for moral responsibility, we are morally responsible for certain beliefs. I now turn to the question of whether we can be responsible for things that are indirectly voluntary.

Responsibility is transitive, meaning that if I am responsible for act A, and act A leads directly to act B which is not voluntary and which was not performed under inculpable ignorance, I am also responsible for B.\textsuperscript{44} I call the responsibility we have for B derivative responsibility. One might claim that not all of our actions are voluntary that contribute to a religious conversion. But the transitivity of responsibility means that for someone to be responsible for a religious conversion, they don’t need to be directly responsible for every act involved. We might be held derivatively responsible for what evidence we expose ourselves to, and be blameworthy ‘when we fail to attend, or relax the attention, letting the relevant propositions slip out of focus.’\textsuperscript{45} In some cases our lack of exposure to the evidence will not be blameworthy – for example, my lack of exposure to the evidence relevant to who shot JFK is not my fault: for one thing, it is kept secret and is not within reasonable reach, and for another, I cannot be expected to direct my expertise to every

\textsuperscript{41} Cf. Cottingham, ‘Descartes and the Voluntariness of Belief’, p. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{42} Williams, ‘Deciding to Believe’, p. 148.
\textsuperscript{43} Amesbury, ‘The Virtues of Belief – Towards a Non-Evidentialist Ethics of Belief-Formation’, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{44} Cf. Aristotle, \textit{Nichomachean Ethics}, Book III, Ch. 1.
\textsuperscript{45} Cottingham, ‘Descartes and the Voluntariness of Belief’, p. 11.
discipline or every question that comes before me.\footnote{This would not hold if I were the chief investigator of that police file, however.} For someone living in a non-religious society or in isolation, they may be inculpably ignorant of the possibility of a formal religiosity, and would therefore not be responsible, while someone who is wilfully ignorant of, or aware of but uninterested in religion, is (whatever the truth of various religious claims) derivatively responsible for their belief or disbelief. The conclusion is that beliefs are able to be indirectly voluntary, and therefore we may under some circumstances have derivative responsibility for holding them.

Amesbury points out that ‘This moral dimension is a result of the fact that belief is not a purely private matter, or one that can be partitioned off from other aspects of life: one's beliefs have consequences for others, as well as for oneself.’\footnote{Amesbury, ‘The Virtues of Belief – Towards a Non-Evidentialist Ethics of Belief-Formation’, p. 27.} It is worth noting that our responsibility for beliefs is linked to the responsibility that we have for our behaviour because beliefs motivate behaviour. Kant highlighted the significance of motive in his ethics, by showing that there is a moral difference between two actions of the same type but where one has a bad motive. Thus which beliefs we hold, and the grounds on which we hold them, are ethically evaluable, and also contribute to the ethical evaluation of those things we base on them.

5.3.2. The voluntariness and ethics of emotion.

The question about the voluntariness of beliefs is linked to the question of the voluntariness of emotion because some beliefs (as we saw in §3.2) are influenced by emotions. In §3.2 it was argued that self-deceptive beliefs are those formed under the influence of emotion, so the thought might be that while we can be held directly responsible for our intentions, we cannot be so held for our emotions and desires, and therefore self-deceptive beliefs must be removed from the realm of moral evaluation. If emotions can be construed so that we are responsible for them, this consequence is avoided, while if emotions are involuntary then we must accept that beliefs that form as a result of strong emotion are not our responsibility either. Lazar admits that ‘[t]he assignment of a central role to emotions in the formation of self-deceptive beliefs is largely incompatible with the view of self-deception as an action. Emotions do not affect one's view of the world through deliberation: they do so immediately and in a
way that, to a high degree, is not subject to our control." This is an unwelcome consequence because we ordinarily see self-deception as a vice, and we do hold people responsible for their self-deceived beliefs as well as their ordinary ones, as this account shows:

On a warm evening in May 2003, approximately 100 undocumented immigrants were loaded into a refrigeration tractor-trailer in south Texas: the driver had been paid $7,500 to smuggle his human cargo past a U.S. Border Patrol checkpoint. But temperatures began to rise inside the sealed trailer, and humidity quickly reached 100 percent - the point at which the human body can no longer cool itself by perspiring and begins to overheat. By the time the driver stopped and unlocked the trailer, 17 passengers were dead, and another two expired after being taken to a nearby hospital. Prosecutors argued that the driver “ignored screaming and banging from inside the trailer,” but his defense attorney “said his client did not know how many people were inside,” and that “the pleas for help were in Spanish,” which the driver did not understand (Rice and George 2006, p. 1). He simply did not believe that anything was wrong and so - it was claimed - bore no responsibility for the deaths of his passengers. […] In December 2006, the driver of the tractor-trailer was convicted on 58 federal smuggling counts, and in January 2007 he was sentenced to life in prison. The jury concluded that if he was in fact ignorant of the plight of his passengers, he was culpably so. Believing that everything was alright did not excuse him of responsibility for what happened, because the beliefs on which he acted (or which nourished his inaction) - even if sincere - were not ones to which he was rationally entitled.49

One might imagine that emotions of greed and self-interest were in play, in place of concern and compassion, which (no matter what the language) might more appropriate be elicited by screams and cries. And yet this does not alleviate his responsibility, or except him from punishment.

We make the accountability in the example more explicable by claiming that self-deceptive beliefs formed under the influence of vicious emotions are blameworthy in that one is responsible for the vice - this implies that our emotions are

48 Lazar, ‘Deceiving Oneself or Self-Deceived?’ p. 282.
directly or indirectly voluntary. I argue that an episode of self-deception is not voluntary in the sense of being deliberate or intentional, but it is not involuntary either: emotions are indirectly voluntary, and so we have derivative responsibility for them. When our emotions lead to self-deceptive beliefs, and indeed, when our emotions motivate morally questionable behaviour, we should temper ourselves better.

One might claim that in order to be responsible for a mechanism, it needs to be responsive to reasons, and if one cannot be aware of this mechanism, it cannot be responsive to reasons; therefore one is not responsible for this mechanism. Given that we are not aware of how our emotions arise, we are not responsible for them. However, moral responsibility for an emotion comes about in cases where the emotion was avoidable, and it is not required that it was also intentional. Our emotional reactions and dispositions do change, but the question is whether all such changes are involuntary, that is, whether the avoidance is something we have some degree of control over. It seems as though our emotional dispositions can change as the result of changing our behavioural habits, and, as this can be voluntary, if this were true then emotion would be indirectly voluntary. Augustine writes that ‘disordered lust springs from a perverted will; when lust is pandered to, a habit is formed; when habit is not checked, it hardens into compulsion.’ 50 When we experience emotion, it is under our voluntary control whether or not we act on it, or form beliefs while under this influence. We can (if we notice that we are emotional) think more carefully, or refrain from certain things until one is feeling less emotional. Perhaps by the time one has lost one’s temper or fallen into a pit of despair, one no longer has the requisite self-awareness. However, controlling one’s temper, and conducting oneself in ways that avoid despair (doing some exercise, talking to a friend, dividing goals into smaller tasks, or whatever might achieve this) are possible.51 Moreover, avoiding things that make us highly emotional (for instance, excessive drinking and tiredness) and cultivating things that make us more

50 Augustine, Confessions, p. 192.
51 ‘[James Gross] found that whereas suppressing feelings is difficult and costly, people could more easily dampen emotion by reinterpreting events in a way that kept feelings from developing. The mentally taxing nature of emotional suppression was found to reduce people’s ability to remember the film they had watched, whereas reinterpreting it did not hamper memory. The fact that cognitive reinterpretation can change and hence dampen emotion is also evident at the neurological level. In brain imaging studies, benign reinterpretations of otherwise disturbing pictures were found to successfully reduce amygdala activity’ Clore, p. 332.
emotionally stable (for instance, regular exercise and meditation) are also within our
direct voluntary control, making our resultant states (unless, as is sometimes probably
the case, we are inculpably ignorant of the ways that our behaviour makes us feel) our
derivative responsibility.

There is another response, highlighted by Rorty, which may be more useful in
practical terms, especially in cases where the self-deception is entrenched and the
personality defects that perpetuate it are particularly ingrained. This is that while we
may not be in a good position to notice our self-deception, our friends, especially as
they do not have the same emotional connections to the objects of our self-deceptive
beliefs, often are. The counsel that we keep, our receptivity to observations and
criticisms from others, our openness to others, and our choices about whether or not to
spend our time with the morally corrupt or the morally good people of the world is to
at least some extent, under our control. Thus (according to Amesbury) what self-
deceivers can be held responsible for (among other things) is keeping one’s own
counsel, rather than appealing to the input of others. To avoid self-deception one
needs ‘a deeper, more perspicacious self-understanding, a clear-sighted view of his
own motives and interests and how they cloud his judgment.’ Amesbury says it well:

[E]thical belief has largely been assumed to be something that can be achieved in
isolation. The problem with this, as we have seen, is that one can be blind to the
biases in one’s own thinking. Thus, the injunction against beliefs to which one is not
entitled often amounts to a command to pull oneself up by one's bootstraps – to
examine oneself as if from the perspective of an outside observer. But while it is not
possible to adopt a third-person perspective on one's own thinking, it is nevertheless
possible to subject one's thinking to external critique. Others may be able to detect
flaws in our thinking that we are unaware of, even though it is safe to assume that
none of us is free from bias altogether.

This is especially interesting in light of the fact that a significant factor in the
longevity of religious conversions (i.e. whether there is a backsliding after a

54 Ibid, p. 35.
55 Ibid, p. 36.
conversion and if so, how quickly) is whether the person integrates and is accepted into a religious community. Often, a person will have a conversion and become part of a religious community, and in these cases the counsel that they keep will be more likely to validate and support the continuation of religious beliefs. It is not contentious to claim that a person is going to be more doubtful, more thorough in their checks, and more likely to come into contact with and consider contrary evidence, if surrounded by militant atheists, than if people who also hold religious beliefs surround them. In the latter case, there is the possibility of ‘collective self-deception’ where members of a group (a jury, a company, or a religious sect) are all self-deceived about the same thing for similar reasons, and then members of the collective mutually reinforce the self-deception. Self-deceptive beliefs are pervasive and take a life-long effort towards self-knowledge and moral improvement to avoid. Emotions have the quality of appearing to arise without our permission or intention; however, in so far as they are dispositional, we can affect both the quality and intensity of our emotions by modifying our behaviour.

Emotion is not merely evaluable in ethical terms; it is necessary in the moral domain. The Aristotelian idea of virtue as the appropriate amount of the appropriate emotion in the right circumstances highlights the necessity of emotion in ethics:

[H]aving the appropriate religious virtues would involve having the appropriate emotional dispositions so that one would not be able to act or think virtuously without having the right feelings, towards the right objects, at the right time, and so on. And without the virtues one would not be able to lead a good life; so emotional engagement wouldn’t merely be an optional extra but a necessary part of what it is to lead a good religious life.^56

In a case where two people perform the same action, and the consequences of the actions are the same in each case; it is not necessarily the case that they are both equally morally worthy. Experiencing certain emotions is morally relevant. It is virtuous to experience compassion in the face of affliction, and righteous anger in the face of the wrong actions of others. If people act completely without feeling, they are classed as psychopathic. As a thought experiment, take a psychopath, Fred, and his psychologically healthy twin, Frank. Fred and Frank both give to charity, but while

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Fred does this unfeelingly because he has copied this behaviour from others in order to appear to fit in. Frank is motivated by a sense of compassion. Are these two equally good? Without the appropriate feeling, something important is missing. For example, in the absence of a feeling of respect for the humanity of another person, something is missing in Fred, even if he acknowledges the humanity of others in an intellectual way: ‘moral understanding, at its deepest and most effective in action, may be lodged in our felt responses to others (how we think of them ‘in our hearts’), rather than in some more discursive account of their significance.’\(^57\) A more radical claim is that ‘it may be that our felt responses offer our only mode of access to certain values’.\(^58\)

The account sketched has shown that religious conversion can be indirectly voluntary, which means that we have derivative responsibility for the state of our own religiosity, and that whether or not we convert is of moral significance. Adams says that:

The deepest reason for accepting this responsibility […] is that it is rightly ours. It is important for a correct ethical appreciation of one’s own life. To refuse to take responsibility for one’s emotions and motives is to be inappropriately alienated from one’s own emotional and appetitive faculties. But we are also interested here in another reason for accepting responsibility for our states of mind-namely, that it is useful for moral improvement to do so.\(^59\)

The idea of moral improvement is the final aspect of religious conversion I shall discuss in the present work.

5.4. Religious conversion as a moral change.

Religious conversion has many dimensions, which we’ve explored individually and in their interactions. We have also, in the current chapter, explored a view on which the integration of all three dimensions allows for a conception of religious conversion as a shift in religious understanding. In this section I’ll explore the quality of this shift as it manifests itself in the lived experience of the convert and of those with whom the covert comes into contact. James claims that the mark of a true convert has to do with

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\(^57\) Wynn, *Emotional Experience and Religious Understanding*, p. 31.


the *quality* (rather than, for instance, the duration or the origin or causal explanation) of the change that occurs in conversion. He thinks that the question of what impact conversion has on the life of the convert, more specifically, the *moral change* that this brings about in his life, is more important than the question of whether the change was brought about by some kind of divine providential intervention. James argues more generally against the view that ‘the worth of a thing can be decided by its origin.’ To apply this to conversion, it follows that whether the conversion originates in divine action of some kind is not of primary importance. The worth conversions should be deemed as having, resides in their ability to improve the lives of the converts.

There won’t be any specific criterion, in terms of any aspect of morality, that will allow the differentiation of converts from non-converts. This is partly because a moral improvement may look very different depending on the starting point of the individual. There might be converts who have made a terrific improvement and greatly increased the quality of their moral lives, but who are nevertheless more despicable than another person who has always been pious and had no conversion. James says that ‘[i]f we roughly arrange human beings in classes, each class standing for a grade of spiritual excellence, I believe we shall find natural men and converts both sudden and gradual in all the classes.’

It will also be difficult to use the idea of ‘moral change’ to distinguish converts from non-converts because of the subtlety of the balance and ordering of both doxastic, affective, and practical aspects of morality. Morality involves each of the same dimensions as religiosity. We have seen that there is an ethics of belief, and of emotion, and most obviously, of behaviour. When Kant’s shopkeeper gives his customer correct change, this is ethical at the behavioural level. However, if the shopkeeper is resentful, it is not ethical at the emotional level. If the shopkeeper believes that giving the right change is worthwhile only because if he failed to do so he might harm his reputation, and if he doesn’t believe that honesty is intrinsically valuable, then we might question the morality of his beliefs.

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60 James, p. 233.
61 James references Professor Leuba, who ‘subordinates the theological aspect of the religious life almost entirely to its moral aspect.’ (Professor Leuba, ‘Studies in the Psychology of Religious Phenomena’, *American Journal of Psychology*, vii. 309 (1896)) ‘In much of Prof. Leuba’s empirical research there is little doctrinal theology involved in the conversion process, and in some cases (as recorded) there seem to be no theological beliefs involved at all – the change is purely ethical’ (James, p. 201).
62 James, p. 235.
Sometimes a moral change may occur in only one of these dimensions. When my sister was younger, she went to church in order to be a good daughter, never feeling what the other churchgoers felt or having any religious beliefs, but merely turning up and singing the hymns. She prayed at the dinner table when she was a guest at a home when it was the ‘done thing’. She gave to charity because she believed in the good work done and that it was her social obligation to contribute to that work, and she was kind to strangers. Then she had a religious conversion, and she still attends church, prays, gives to charity and is kind to strangers. Viewing the behaviour she adopts, she is still doing the same things at the physical or behavioural level, so it may appear that nothing has changed. While her charitable or kind actions would be described as good or right before the conversion, this picture is incomplete, and there is room for a fuller or deeper or more integrated state. Whereas she used to attend church and sing the hymns, since her conversion she feels like she belongs there, and she feels stirred by the music that she sings. The words have taken on a new significance, and she has different beliefs about her participation. Likewise, she has different beliefs about her prayers, and she is more sincere and emotionally engaged when she makes them. She still gives to charity, but now there is a stronger sense of moral obligation, a new sense of compassion for those she helps, and also new beliefs relating to it. Her kindness to strangers is now underpinned by a deeply felt connection between herself and all of humanity under God, as though the worth of all people is now felt in a way that it wasn’t before, when it was perhaps merely understood intellectually. So while we may say that she was a good person prior to her conversion, these added dimensions still constitute a significant moral change, and we can say of her that her moral life is richer and deeper because it encompasses these added dimensions. To get a full picture of the quality of the moral life of an individual we therefore need to consider each dimension and how they look when viewed together, with their many points of interaction.

I have already shown that there is an ethics of belief, an ethics of emotion, and an ethics of action. Given that these are dimensions of religious conversion, there is too an ethics of religious conversion, meaning that we can evaluate conversions on moral grounds. It may appear as though this reasoning commits a composition fallacy. This would be the case if we were equivocating over the term ‘ethics’ so that the premises that each dimension has an ‘ethics’ would not validly entail the conclusion that conversion has an ‘ethics’. However, as long as we construe ‘ethics’ in the latter
case with a wide enough scope, so as to encompass the more specific uses in each premise, it is a legitimate claim that if the conversion process involves several other processes which we can evaluate ethically, then we can evaluate conversion ethically by compounding our evaluations of each of those processes that comprise it.

In my discussion of the ethics of belief I concluded that a belief was ethical if it was morally justified, which is the case whenever it is either epistemically justified (meaning based upon sufficient evidence) or is a genuine option (meaning that it is live, forced, and momentous). I claimed that emotions are morally justified if they are appropriate, which meant reasonable and proportionate given the stimulus. Actions are justified when they accord with what is morally right. What this turns out to be will depend on the meta-ethical and normative views that turn out to be true, but on a practical level there is an extensive consensus between most views about the rightness and wrongness of most actions. While this is very vague, our intuitive ideas of right and wrong will allow us to gauge whether there has been a moral improvement when we see all the actions of a particular agent. So we can say that a conversion will be morally justified when the beliefs, emotions, and actions are morally justified.

5.5. Concluding remarks.

This chapter has outlined my model of religious conversion, and established an important implication of this research: by showing that religious conversion can be undertaken voluntarily, I concluded that religious conversion is a process for which an individual can be responsible, and we can therefore see religious conversion as a moral issue. We can usefully see religious conversion as both a shift in one’s full understanding of the world, and also as moral change. Full understanding is a state reached through integration of one’s beliefs, emotions, and actions, and when these aspects all align with respect to religious understanding, one may achieve a full (or at least fuller) religious understanding, which we would expect to be part of a religious conversion. Moral change can occur when the moral status of any of the three dimensions changes.

63 In §2.4.1.
64 In §3.4.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has shown the areas of uncertainty and complexity involved in the concept of religious conversion and has also shown many points of contact between religious conversion and other core questions in philosophy. I have touched on epistemology, philosophy of language, of mind and of psychology, philosophy of emotion and action, and moral philosophy. This broad approach is necessitated by the breadth of the subject matter. It is my hope that the many connections to other areas of philosophy may spark interest and further research in such a way as to further illuminate, and also to challenge and improve upon, the account here offered.

In Chapter One I elucidated some of the difficulties presented by trying to get a solid and definitive grasp of what we mean when we ask what ‘religious conversion’ is, and concluded that the terms involved are both vague and context sensitive. The lesson here was that we should be as clear as possible in communication to specify pertinent aspects of the context (for example be clear about which tradition’s ‘God’ we are discussing); but that for many purposes, the rough and ready intuitions and judgements we all have as part of a linguistic community will suffice. I also proposed a model on which there is an interesting analogy between scientific revolution and religious conversion.\(^1\) The conclusion of this chapter proposed a model of religious conversion on which it involves different dimensions, working in interaction.

In Chapters Two, Three, and Four, I explored the role of beliefs, emotions, and behaviour respectively. Each of these involved consideration of the nature of these aspects, and the role that these aspects play in conversion, as well as the interactions between them. I gave special consideration to the role of religious experience in belief formation, as I argued that experience is a more foundational mechanism for belief formation given that testimony is the delivery of a second hand belief derived from experience, and that in both the direct and indirect forms of belief formation via analytic methods, the premises that arguments are based upon are themselves ultimately grounded in experience (or if not, are only capable of proving analytic truths).

\(^1\) Cottingham in ‘Religious Conversion as Moral Change’ presents a model on which religious conversion is analogous to psychoanalysis, which also has interesting illuminations to offer.
The discussion led to an appraisal of what conditions might lead one to rule out religious experiences being accepted as justified, although it was recognised that the beliefs might gain justification in different ways, or via different mechanisms. Specifically, I outlined three ways in which something can be justified: epistemically; pragmatically; and morally. Additionally, beliefs can gain justification in part through emotions, so the question of religious experience broadens from simply discussing the way that beliefs may or may not meet epistemic standards for justification, to the way that beliefs and emotions may or may not meet any kind of justification.

The emotions can be assessed in terms of rationality, and they influence belief formation. The interaction between belief and emotion gave rise to a discussion of self-deception, and it turned out that some (but not all) religious beliefs are self-deceptive due to the influence of the emotion separating the belief from the evidence. However, if the emotions which drive the self-deceptive beliefs are themselves rational, their influence on belief formation might be seen as a pragmatically useful tool, and have a legitimate place in the rational functioning of an agent. Therefore, given that religious experiences involve strong emotions, this influence will be capable in theory of bestowing additional justification on the resulting beliefs where certain conditions are met.

Discussion of the interactions between praxis and the doxastic and affective dimensions took the form of a consideration of the role of belief and emotion in action. I concluded that both belief and emotion are involved in behaviour, and that our behaviour influences both emotions and belief. The interactions formed the basis of my account of the dynamics of religious conversion, which I likened to a spiral, and I gave a typology of ways in which particular sequences of affect can be dominant or prior in some conversions. Although most conversions will be a mixture of these types, there may nevertheless be value in classifying conversions according to their emphasis and weight.

To summarise some of the aforementioned conclusions and fill in some gaps to gain a fuller picture:

1. A belief, B, is epistemically justified iff B is based upon sufficient evidence.
2. A belief, B, is morally justified iff B is either epistemically justified or is a genuine option.
A belief, B, is pragmatically justified iff the belief is a hinge belief and that belief leads to overall better consequences than the non-adoption of that belief or than the adoption of the negation of that belief.

An emotion, E, is epistemically justified iff E has as a component a belief, B, and B is justified.

An emotion, E, is morally justified iff E is appropriate and proportionate given the stimulus.

An emotion, E, is pragmatically justified iff E is able to affect better overall consequences than would be possible without E.

An action, A, is epistemically justified iff the beliefs connected to that action are justified.

An action, A, is morally justified iff that action accords with what is morally right.

An action, A, is pragmatically justified iff in situation S if that action leads to overall better consequences than the non-performance of that action.

A conversion, C, is epistemically justified iff the beliefs, emotions, and behaviours are epistemically justified.

A conversion, C, is morally justified iff the relevant beliefs, emotions, and behaviours are morally justified.

A conversion, C, is pragmatically justified iff the relevant beliefs, emotions, and behaviours are pragmatically justified.

A conversion, C, is justified iff the relevant beliefs, emotions, and behaviours are either epistemically, morally, or pragmatically justified.

I have also argued that each of the three dimensions involved in conversion has an ethics. We can morally evaluate beliefs and emotions as well as actions (and indeed action itself involves both belief and emotion). In order to establish my conclusion about the ethical evaluability of the beliefs, emotions and actions involved in conversion, I first argued that there is at least an indirectly voluntary component in these domains. Having established these results, I was in a position to argue that conversion itself is ethically evaluable. This means that whether or not we convert is our moral responsibility (whatever the value, positive or negative) and that when we
convert, the conversion itself might be evaluated positively or negatively depending on whether the beliefs, emotions, and actions involved are morally good, or not.

I don’t pretend that this account means that it is clear which cases of religious conversion are justified, and which are not. Likewise, I don’t pretend that this account means that it is clear when a person is ethically responsible for their conversion, or whether a specific case involves self-deception, inappropriate emotions, inauthentic behaviour, or some kind of pathology. This isn’t surprising. Moral philosophy’s best efforts can tell us that the right thing to do is that which has the best consequences, but not what the consequences of each action we consider will be or how to judge which count as best; or that the right thing to do is that which the virtuous person would do, but not who should count as virtuous; or that the right thing to do is that which accords to some universal laws, but not which laws hold. Of course, this may seem simpler to a religious person who believes that their religion offers an objective morality. But one cannot defend the moral status of their religiosity by first assuming the truth of the content of the religion to which they adhere, without begging the question against their interlocutor. This thesis has aimed to give a general account of conversion that avoids restriction to any one faith or sect, and thus it would be inappropriate to presuppose the validity of a specific religious ethic. What we can say, is that whichever meta-ethical and normative view turns out to be right will be applicable to religious conversion.

What I have shown is that there is philosophical room for religious conversions that do count as justified. I have also shown that there is philosophical room for ethical responsibility for religious conversion on a personal level. What this means, is that while I, sat at a computer, and you, sat in a chair, may not have a blueprint for deciding whether any person we may know, or think of, is right or wrong with regard to their state of religiosity, both you and I are able to engage in honest and sincere self-reflection to ensure that as far as possible we are happy to take the burden of responsibility for our own religiosity. We all must, as part of a life’s work, ensure that we have scrutinised our beliefs, examined the evidence, taken into honest account the stimulus we’ve experienced, sought out the experiences that we can to create the most balanced state possible, measured our emotions and engaged in self-moderation where we can, sought the counsel of those we would emulate in their morality and religiosity, and ensure that we act as best we can to live good and moral lives. We must because it is our responsibility to do so, and we are accountable.
In §1.1.2 I used Dali’s painting ‘Gala Contemplating The Mediterranean Sea Which At Twenty Meters Becomes The Portrait Of Abraham Lincoln’ as an illustration. What we noted was that one’s worldview changes during a religious conversion, and an analogy was drawn between on the one hand the change that occurs from seeing Dali’s painting as of Gala to seeing it as a painting as of Lincoln, and on the other hand the change that occurs in moving from a non-religious to a religious outlook. We can extend the analogy in the following way. The painting is on the wall of the art gallery and we are all in the gallery. Some people never walk past the picture so there is no way they could convert – they will see neither Lincoln nor Gala. These people will be inculpably ignorant of whatever truths they’d glean from viewing the picture, and religious belief is not a live option for them. Some may walk by and glance at it, or casually view the painting, but may fail to see Lincoln at all. This may be because they somehow walk by the picture altogether, don’t read the instructions on the wall, or pay insufficient attention or attend in the wrong ways. Attention is key in a conversion – if we are not present we cannot be moved by the experience we are having, and it cannot transform us. But even for those who apprehend Lincoln suddenly appearing in the painting, not everyone will be moved by the magnificence of this – not everyone will appreciate the skill and mastery of the vision required to manifest this image on the canvass. For those who are so moved, not all will be converted by the experience – some will rationalise away the magnitude of the aesthetic experience, or analyse it to obscurity, won’t trust the memory of it and will doubt its significance, or will simply pay it no further attention and so allow the effects to dwindle to nothing, remaining unchanged. I am thus drawing an analogy between a profound aesthetic experience where people may be transported, moved, inspired, or silenced by great beauty, in such a way that it changes them, and allows them to have a deeper, richer, more engaged and aware appreciation of beauty thereafter, and religious conversion. Just as the painting is made up of brush strokes, objects, and colour so conversion is made up of actions, beliefs, and emotions, and none of these trios can be completely separated while the others remain intact. Seeing how these things hang together are ways of understanding.

When one journeys back to view the painting from a different and newly acquired perspective, what happens is analogous to a conversion process. There will come a point on one’s walk backwards where suddenly Lincoln is apprehended for
the first time. But this is not all there is to it. Art moves us not just at the moment we first grasp it but when it begins to reach us at the deepest level. From the new angle, different light shines on the painting and we can appreciate it in ways that were not accessible to us at the closer angle. So here is an analogy to the moral change involved in conversion. It is as if we do not merely stand still and become aware of new pixels on the image we are contemplating, but start to move ourselves, to change our own position so that the image seems, feels, and is qualitatively different to us. And whether we seek out this painting, whether we sustain our attention or not, and whether we appreciate the significance of the shift in image in a way that changes our beliefs, our feelings, and our actions, and the course of our whole life thereafter, is something that we must answer for, if not to a higher being, then at least to ourselves.
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