Transformative Experience and the Problem of Religious Disagreement
Joshua Blanchard (Oakland University) and L.A. Paul (Yale University)

0. Introduction

Peer disagreement presents religious believers, agnostics, and skeptics alike with an epistemological problem: how can confidence in any religious claims (including their negations) be epistemically justified? There seem to be rational, well-informed adherents among a variety of mutually incompatible religious and non-religious perspectives, and so the problem of disagreement arises acutely in the religious domain. In this paper, we show that the transformative nature of religious experience and identity poses more than just this traditional, epistemic problem of conflicting religious beliefs. In encountering one another, believers, agnostics, and skeptics confront not just different beliefs, but different *ways of being a person*.

To transition between religious belief and skepticism is not just to adopt a different set of beliefs, but to transform into a different version of oneself. We argue that the transformative nature of religious identity intensifies the problem of pluralism by adding a new dimension to religious disagreement, for there are principled reasons to think we can lack epistemic and affective access to our potential religious, agnostic, or skeptical selves. Yet, access to these selves seems to be required for the purposes of decision-making that is to be both rational and authentic. Finally, we reflect on the relationship between the transformative problem of religious disagreement and what it shows about the epistemic status of religious conversion and deconversion, in which one disagrees with one's own (transformed) self.

In §1, we briefly characterize the problem of religious disagreement in its general form, which we view as a species of the more general problem of peer disagreement. In §2, we introduce the phenomenon of distinctly transformative experience, with an eye toward discussing the special case of religious experience. In §3, we describe at length how the transformative nature of religious experience seriously exacerbates and complicates the problem of religious disagreement. In §4, we pose a newew problem of religious disagreement that arises especially in cases of religious conversion or deconversion: disagreement with one's own potential (or past) self. Finally, in §5 we offer concluding remarks.

1. The Problem of Religious Disagreement

The problem of religious disagreement is a species of the more general problem of peer disagreement. The problem of peer disagreement, in its basic form, is the problem someone faces when she believes that p and knowingly encounters someone who believes that $\sim p$ from a context of approximately equivalent reasoning ability, evidence, and position to know whether p.

The problem of disagreement is especially acute for religious believers. There is a dizzying variety of mutually inconsistent religious beliefs in the world, much of it undergirded by centuries, sometimes

millennia, of deep thought alongside profound individual and collective experiences. The fact of religious pluralism means that, for virtually any religious belief that *p*, anyone who believes that *p* will face the problem of peer disagreement.

Concomitant with the fact of pluralism, intrareligious epistemology has a tendency to exacerbate the problem of disagreement even further for religious believers. For example, unlike publicly available and easily repeatable experiences that might ground scientific or other ordinary belief, the religious experiences that partly undergird religious belief can be radically private in nature, recalcitrant to repetition and even, in some cases, linguistic expression. Moreover, the major religious traditions themselves are partly constituted by epistemological frameworks that sometimes require parochial sources of knowledge, e.g., particular scriptures, traditions, teachers, or even *sui generis* cognitive faculties. This exacerbates the problem because when two religious believers disagree, their disagreement may be epistemically incommensurate within any single epistemological framework. Contrast this with two people who disagree about where the closest coffee shop is located, or who come up with different answers to a mathematical problem: especially if they are epistemic peers, they are likely to agree about the basic epistemological framework for figuring such matters out. Not so for religious belief.

Like its parent problem, the problem of religious disagreement is plausibly theorized as a problem of higher-order evidence, that is, evidence about the link between one's beliefs and the first-order evidence or other *desiderata* of epistemic standing that undergird it. The fact that *S* disagrees with an epistemic peer, *S**, provides *S* with higher-order evidence *about the link between* S*'s belief that* p *and the evidence or* S*'s epistemic standing*, not necessarily evidence about *p* itself. Through disagreement, *S* acquires defeasible evidence that there is something faulty in *S*'s evidence, reasoning, epistemic character, position, or some other aspect of S's epistemic situation.

We do not reject any of the above standard characterization of the problem of religious disagreement, as far as it goes. We argue that reflecting on the nature of transformative experience shows that religious disagreement is not *only* a matter of disagreement about particular religious propositions, or *only* a matter of disagreement with others. After introducing the concept of transformative experience, we address those issues in turn.

2. Transformative Experience
The standard, intuitive model of rational decision-making assesses the rationality of decisions with reference to an agent's assessment of the probabilities and subjective values of the outcomes of her various options, typically in light of the assessments and preferences that she has at the point of decision. This model works well for lots of decisions that we make. Suppose you're going to the movies and deciding whether to see the historical drama or the space opera. You've seen and like plenty of both genres, and you already know that you're more in the mood for sci-fi. But you check online and see that the drama has considerably better reviews. The decision involves a potential gamble, but it's not a mystery *how* you go about making it—you're well enough informed about the probabilities and values to rationally make and act on a judgment.

But it turns out that many other decisions that we make, including everyday decisions, involve deciding whether to have what Paul (2014) calls a *transformative experience*. Suppose you're applying for

graduate school and deciding whether to pursue philosophy or theology. You've studied and enjoyed both subjects, and you've recently been on a philosophy kick. Like picking movie genres, this decision also involves a gamble, but it's of a structurally different sort. You're *not* necessarily well-enough informed about the probabilities and values to rationally make and act on a judgment, at least not in the standard way. The decision point involves a gamble, but not just a gamble on whether you'll enjoy yourself. You're gambling *on the very self that you'll become.* Pursuing philosophy may transform you in a way that pursuing theology wouldn't—and *vice versa.* You have a rough idea of what it will be like, what and who *you* will be like, coming out of the movie theater, but this is not so for the divergent paths of graduate study in philosophy or theology.

Transformative experiences are those experiences that change the agent in certain deep ways—especially, experiences the very having of which modify an agent's beliefs and valuations in a manner inaccessible to her current cognitive makeup. The nature of transformative experience seems to *preclude* authentic rational decision-making—at least, on the standard model. This is partly because, in order to assess the subjective values of the experiential outcomes of one's options for oneself, one must in a sense project oneself into the future experiences and determine what their value is. That is to say, one must be able to have a certain kind of empathy with one's (potential) future self. But if the candidate experiences will themselves transform one's evaluative stance (Paul calls these *personally transformative experiences*), one loses the ability to make these valuations—at least in any direct way. *Vis-à-vis* rational decision-making, you don't know what a transformative experience is like until it's too late. The same goes for beliefs and other epistemic attitudes. Epistemically transformative experiences teach you something new, something that you could not know or see except through having the experience. So, if you want to gain this new information, and you aren't willing to rely solely on the testimony of others, you have to, in a sense, take a leap in the dark.

Because our discussion focuses on the largely *sui generis* phenomenon of religious experiences, it is worth re-emphasizing that our lives are chock-full of transformative decision-making. Everything from deciding whether to have children, to planning for end of life care, to embarking on gender transition, to thinking about illness or choosing medical treatments, involves making choices that may result in personal and epistemic transformation. Transformative experience is, then, quite ordinary.[1]

3. Having Religious Beliefs and Being a Religious Person

There is a thin, purely doxastic aspect of being religious that poses the problem of religious disagreement but does not necessarily implicate the additional problems of transformative experience. For example, someone might transition from bare atheism to bare theism in such a way that has little to no implication for their other beliefs, practices, evaluative assessments, and so on.[2] Ordinary religious belief, however, is not like this. Religion is not an exclusively epistemic phenomenon, but in its major forms implicates the whole of a person's life. To be a religious person is not just to have some stereotypically religious beliefs, but to adopt a *way of being in (and seeing) the world.*

[1] On having children, see Paul (2015). On end-of-life care and issues having to do with dying, see Thompson (forthcoming). On gender transition, see McKinnon (2015). On illness, see Carel, Kidd, and Pettigrew (2016). On medical research, see Paul and Healy (2018).
[2] Antony Flew's (2007) transition from atheism to mere deism is a possible example. See also Oppenheimer (2007).

In the context of considering religion in the real world, asking the question "What should I believe?" is really part of asking the question, "Who shall I become?" Becoming religious or irreligious is becoming a different kind of person, a person with a radically different set of lived experiences, values, and beliefs.

The distinctive nature of religious transformation means that peer disagreement is not just a matter of conflicting belief, but of conflicting ways of being a person. The standard examples in the literature on peer disagreement, including examples having to do with mere religious beliefs, are not adequate to capture the full force and scope of this conflict.[3]

To appreciate the complexity of religious disagreement in the context of possible transformative experience, it's useful to consider an example confrontation between a skeptic and a religious believer. Although what follows is certainly not the only kind of confrontation there might be between believer and skeptic, we think it is sufficiently representative to serve our discussion.[4]

First, consider the believer. The believer exults in the rich satisfaction of his faith, in the communal life, traditions, and revelations which attend the experience of opening his mind to God. His belief in God, we can assume, is not arrived at by mere rational deliberation. Rather, his faith is a matter of the total and all-encompassing orientation of his whole life.[5] For the believer, Pascal's description of God's relationship to believers strongly resonates:

> [H]e is a God who fills the soul and heart of those whom he possesses; he is a God who makes them inwardly aware of their wretchedness and his infinite mercy; who unites himself to the depths of their soul; who fills their soul with humility, joy, confidence, love; who makes them incapable of any other end but himself (Pascal 2005: S690, 227-8).

Moreover, the believer finds within himself no ability to conceive of relationship with God as anything but good. In the words of Marilyn Adams, "intimate relation to [divine goodness] is … incommensurately good for created persons."[6]

Now consider the skeptic. The skeptic has no such experience of God and desires no such relationship. He sees no compelling physical evidence for the existence of God, and reasons that, if there were a God, there'd be some sort of compelling evidence of his existence.[7] Moreover, the godless perspective on life does not depress him. In fact, the skeptic finds that his lack of belief in

[3] For a different and important perspective on a puzzle raised by transformative experience for religious disagreement, see De Cruz (2018). De Cruz argues that the transformative nature of conversion makes it difficult to tell whether someone you regard as a peer should still be so regarded by you after they (de)convert. Her central question is whether and how transformative conversion changes the evidential value of what would otherwise be peer disagreement.
[4] For an extended discussion of the material in this section, see Paul (forthcoming 2020), "Transformative religious experience and the paradox of empathy", Episteme.
[5] For an extended discussion from the Christian perspective that we find highly congenial, see William Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*.
[6] Marilyn Adams, *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (26, 82-83).
[7] J.L. Schellenberg has developed this intuitive thought in a variety of creative ways. For an up-to-date treatment, see his recent book, *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God.*

God (and, in particular, an afterlife) imbues the world with a distinctive value, a kind of preciousness that it would not otherwise have.

As rationally sensitive people, both the believer and the skeptic feel the need to confront their disagreement head-on; they recognize that it won't do simply to retreat into their respective first-order beliefs.

The skeptic concludes that belief in God probably amounts to indulging in a psychological need for comfort. He doesn't begrudge the believer for having such a need, but he has no desire to engage in what he takes to be an exercise in self-deception. From his perspective, he is the clearer thinker: in the cold hard light of day, he reasons to the most likely conclusion.

The believer, when confronted with the reasoning of the skeptic, argues that the skeptic has jumped the epistemic gun: in order to be properly receptive to the evidence, one must first be open to detecting it. To borrow the terminology of Paul Moser, the skeptic must be properly "attuned" to the kind of "purposively available evidence" that God would provide, that is to say, evidence available only to those with the kind of attitudes and character that are conducive to the sort of relationship with created persons that God would want.[8] To properly assess the case for and against belief, the skeptic should not only open his mind to the metaphysical possibility of divine creation, but he must additionally develop an openness to the possibility of total, unmitigated submission to the will of another—God. While this all surely involves rational inquiry, it also involves religious practice and radical transformation of character. Only under these conditions can he expect to detect evidence that would be relevant to his assessment, should there be any.

But the skeptic may reasonably refuse. Why? It may seem that refusal to be open to the perspective of the other side, refusal to fully participate in the activities the believer finds significant, smacks of intolerance and irrationality. If the skeptic is truly interested in unbiased assessment of both sides of the question, how can he refuse to engage in this way? In our example confrontation, isn't it the skeptic who is really engaging in an act of self-deception, a case study of closed-mindedness?

Not necessarily. Both the pleas of the believer and the resistance of the skeptic suggest that their dispute has additional structure beyond mere epistemic disagreement.

Notice that the religious experience of conversion is just the sort of transformative experience that can radically revise both one's epistemic perspective and personal commitments. In his classic study of religious experience, William James describes cases of instantaneous conversion as events in which "often amid tremendous emotional excitement or perturbation of the senses, a complete division is established in the twinkling of an eye between the old life and the new."[9] Deciding to potentially undergo such an experience is to make a decision of tremendous personal consequence.[10] As James writes,

[8] Paul Moser, *The Elusive God.*
[9] William James, *Varieties*, Lecture 10, p. 162.
[10] See De Cruz (2018)'s important qualification that transformative conversions need not be instantaneous, but can be (and, as empirical research suggests, usually are) gradual (267-268).

It makes a great difference to a man whether one set of his ideas, or another, be the centre of his energy; and it makes a great difference, as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him. To say that a man is "converted" means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place, and that religious aims form the habitual centre of his energy.[11]

So, if having a religious experience is transformative, then issues concerning alien perspectives and preferences arise. In this context, we can understand the skeptic's resistance as involving aversion to becoming a certain kind of possible self. Right now, of course, he is sure he is right—he does not believe God exists, and he does not think he *should* (in the epistemic sense) believe that God exists.

But there is more than that. He fears that, if he truly imagined or engaged with the perspective of the believer—perhaps going so far as to experimentally engage in religious practice and open his mind up to total submission to God—it might change not just his beliefs, but his character and values in a way that, from his current perspective, he cannot sanction. He is not quite afraid, in the first instance, that he'll simply gain new evidence that, given his current preferences and perspective, will change his assessment of the situation; on the contrary, he's happy to read some natural theology here and there. Rather, he is afraid that having a religious experience will corrupt his intellectual capacities and wider cognitive life somehow. That is, he is afraid that having a religious experience will transform him both epistemically and personally. It will transform him in a way that will make him psychologically alien to his current self—and only *then* will he (that is, his alien self) find what seems to be evidence for God. Of course, *that* potential self won't have any problem with this, but that's precisely part of what is so disturbing by the skeptic's present lights.

Now, what sort of experience is involved here from the point of view of the believer? The believer takes it to be the spiritual experience of recognizing the divine, mediated by a distinctive cognitive faculty, perhaps what John Calvin famously defended as the *sensus divinitatis*. The *sensus divinitatis*, or the faculty that tends to produce belief in God in the right circumstances, involves one's capacity to know God. It has a cognitive, quasi-perceptual component, and when exercised, endows one with a grasp or understanding of God's divine majesty.

Alvin Plantinga, following both Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, describes sensing the divine as analogous to experiencing the world in other sensory ways, such as tasting honey or seeing red for the first time. But religious experience, unlike these examples, is not merely epistemic. Like Pascal, Moser, and James, Plantinga understands such experiences as involving a reorientation of the whole person. He writes, "Conversion… is fundamentally a turning of the will, a healing of the disorder of affection that afflicts us. It is a turning away from love of self, from thinking of oneself as the chief being of the universe, to love of God."[12]

On this account, the exercise of the *sensus divinitatis* involves experiencing the moral and authoritative qualities of God in a way that necessitates change in the subject of the experience. Once you have

[11] James, Lecture 9, p. 147.
[12] Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, p. 311.

the experience, you very naturally and easily are moved to faith. You naturally reflect and develop a belief in God *via* this very reflection—it's not hypnosis or like being drugged.

On a picture where manifesting one's capacity to engage with the divine leads one noninferentially and naturally to believe in and wholly submit to God, we can interpret the resistance of the skeptic as a resistance to any future that involves the real possibility of becoming someone who is not currently a *candidate self* for him.[13]

So, it's not mere fear of epistemic change that keeps the skeptic from taking belief seriously as an option. Rather, it's fear of losing one's connection to one's past selves, and of becoming a future self who is alien to one's current self.

These reflections give us a better model for what is going on in the disagreement between the skeptic and the believer. The skeptic isn't merely stubbornly defending the *status quo*, and he isn't merely resisting a change in perspective. Instead, the skeptic is confronted with the argument that to truly and fairly assess the value of believing in God, he should open his mind and allow himself to potentially transform into a radically alien self.

Mere descriptions of this experience fall short, of course, just as mere descriptions—for the uninitiated—of what it is like to see red or what it is like to taste honey, fall short. The skeptic must have the experience itself in order to understand and fully grasp the divine.

This poses a familiar problem, cast in a new light. The trouble is that, *if* the skeptic is deliberating over whether to allow himself to have the experience, he cannot cognitively model how he will respond to the experience before he has it. He simply has to have the experience to know what it is like and how he will respond. In the case of religious disagreement over theistic faith, the issue of whether or not to become a religious person is inextricably linked to the issue of whether or not to believe in God. Suppose the skeptic wants to do everything he can to find out whether God exists, but *also* wants to preserve an authentic, recognizable self in the course of doing so. It seems that he may be incapable of doing both of these things.

This means that the skeptic must decide whether to allow himself to have the experience of sensing the divine without knowing, in the most salient respect, what to expect, and potentially without being able to determine whether his subsequent experiences are veridical.

That is to say, if he opens his mind so that he can experience God, he risks losing (his current self's) control of his values, preferences, and beliefs, and becoming someone who is psychologically alien to him now—whether or not God really exists. In particular, he risks becoming someone who thinks very differently about the fundamental nature of the world and who evaluates experience very differently from how he does now, and he finds such a perspective and having such a value structure to be cognitively alien to who he presently is.

---

[13] By "candidate self," we mean something different from what William James calls a *live option*. Even a self that is a live option may nevertheless not be a "candidate self" for you, in the event that the self's beliefs and values would be fundamentally alien to those you currently hold.

So, the skeptic risks losing permanent control of his beliefs and preferences in a way that entails he would be alienated from the future self that would result from the change. And this is why the skeptic refuses to entertain the perspective of the believer or to explore the possibility of awakening the *sensus divinitatis* in himself.

The worry, of course, isn't just one for the skeptic. We've spent our time developing the case for the skeptic, but the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the believer, especially one who is deeply and authentically repulsed by the forlorn existence of the skeptic. From the believer's point of view, it may be that only "the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'"[14] From his current standpoint, he may think that non-belief is the result of "sin and its cognitive consequences," a *malfunction* of *sensus divinitatis* due to various moral failings, especially a kind of arrogance that resists submission to God.[15]

With this, we can see how confronting religious disagreement in a rational manner implicates the problems of exploring religious transformative experience and the problematic metaphysics of the self. In the case of religious disagreement, one cannot escape problems of belief change and self-deception. This discussion of religious disagreement also brings out deep ways in which empathy for our other selves connects to ideas about how we understand, control, and form ourselves, and to central issues involving living in a religiously pluralistic society.

4. Transformative Self-Disagreement
Religious pluralism raises the problem of disagreement in a straightforward and particularly acute way, and we have shown how problems of transformative experience complicate how one responds to it. But by reflecting on the nature of transformative experience and its relationship to religious belief and personhood, we can see that religious conversion raises an additional, distinct (problem of disagreement, namely, *disagreement with one's former or possible selves.*[16]

To see the problem clearly, we need to carefully distinguish between two kinds of conversion. Imagine someone raised in a secular environment who has never encountered the arguments of natural theology. Such a person may encounter these arguments, convert, and rightly judge that their conversion involved an advancement of knowledge (at the very least, knowledge of more reasons in favor of theistic belief). So described, this is not the kind of conversion that raises a problem of *peer* disagreement with oneself, because the pre- and post-conversion selves are decidedly not epistemic peers, even by their own lights. The *transformative conversion* at issue in this paper is of a different kind. The convert may not have learned new, objective information, but instead come to see the world—that is, the same old facts—in a new light. In such a case, the convert may not find it possible to imaginatively inhabit her own old perspective, and the potential convert may not find it possible to imaginative inhabit her possible new perspective. Compare: after deciding to see the sci-fi movie,

14 Psalm 14:1.
15 See Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, chapter 7.
16 Helen De Cruz (2018) introduces and addresses the problem of how a convert should see her former self vis-à-vis epistemic peerhood (268-270). De Cruz sees this problem as one about *irrelevant influences*: the convert has reason to worry that her new beliefs are the result of causes that are not sensitive to the truth. De Cruz marshals sociological and other evidence to argue that it is not obvious that post-conversion beliefs have a comparative advantage here. "The factors underlying conversion cases do not seem to be more epistemically vicious or benign than factors underlying original religious belief formation (for example, parental religious affiliation)" (170).

you can easily access what it was like before you saw it. And you could imagine either liking or hating the movie ahead of time. But after, say, having a child, it's remarkably difficult to imaginatively re-inhabit what your world was like before, and you can't (accurately) imaginatively inhabit the new world with your child before you have them.

Intuitively—but, we think, mistakenly—religious (de-)conversion even of this second, transformative kind is thought to be either an advancement or a regression. Often this depends on whether one is taking an internal or external point of view. For example, a convert to a religious or irreligious perspective may claim that their newfound identity reflects an advancement of their knowledge of the world or an improvement in their character. Likewise, a detractor (say, someone dismayed that their family member has become religious) may think the opposite, that the convert has in fact become more ignorant or confused about the world.[17]

This is all regarding how conversion looks from the inside versus the outside, where the subject of the conversion is understood to be necessarily "on the inside". The standard assumption is that, from the inside, conversion necessarily looks like an advancement. But if we assume that a religious convert has undergone a *transformative conversion*, then the convert in fact may face a problem *even from within her own perspective*, because in the deepest metaphysical sense she is *not* "on the inside" with respect to *both* her former and newly converted selves.[18] Given the epistemically and personally transformative nature of such a conversion, the convert may not be in a position to evaluate the conversion from an epistemically or personally neutral perspective.

If the convert is aware of the problems of transformative experience, then she can know what her situation is—*vis-à-vis* transformation—and hence she can know that she is not in a position to know that she has advanced rather than regressed. Because she is not in a position to neutrally distinguish between her former and current epistemic positions, her relationship to her former self is structurally identical to the relationship of epistemic peer disagreement. To be sure, all that stands between her post- and pre-conversion self may be the conversion experience or process itself, but this is precisely the divide across which she cannot evaluate her epistemic and personal transformation.

This means that religious believers and skeptics who arrive at their positions through (de-)conversion are permanently faced with a problem of peer disagreement even beyond the usual problem of disagreement posed by pluralism. We call this the problem of *transformative self-disagreement*.

How should the convert respond to this problem? We think that the best responses will follow whatever are the best responses to peer disagreement generally. For example, if you're a dogmatist

---

[17] For an extended discussion of how one ought to react to the conversion of a peer, see De Cruz (2018: 271-275).
[18] De Cruz (2018) argues that, even in cases of transformative conversion, the convert has one additional piece of evidence, namely the knowledge "that her religious beliefs can be changed" (270). Our response to this is twofold. First, this doesn't address the *forward-looking* aspect of the problem that we present, the problem of disagreeing with one's *potential* or *future* self. But more to the point, we don't see why a person cannot, pre-conversion, know that her beliefs can change. After all, it's precisely a change in beliefs (and way of being a person) that a would-be convert is justifiably worried about on our account. Our story about the believer and the skeptic in the previous section plausibly presupposes that both individuals know that they *can* change.

who thinks that it is reasonable to stand one's ground in the face of peer disagreement, then you should think this in the case of transformative self-disagreement as well. According to this view, it is rationally permissible to fully endorse one's post-conversion beliefs, even though one does not have independent reason to think that one is in a better position to know than before. If you're a conciliationist who think that it is reasonable to "split the difference" or otherwise lower your credence in your own beliefs in the face of peer disagreement, then you should think this in the case of transformative self-disagreement as well. According to this view, it is rationally obligatory to lower one's credence in light of the fact that one has no independent reason to think that one is in a better position to know than before.

Our understanding of the problem of religious disagreement with oneself, especially as it relates to the conciliationist response to that problem, is connected to a problem developed by Daniel Garber for the epistemology implicit in Pascal's famous wager argument. According to Garber, "wagering" for God (by engaging in religious practice as if God exists) is a kind of inquiry that may reveal God's existence to the wagerer *only if God exists*, but may nevertheless produce belief in God *even if God does not exist*. One incurs a certain epistemic risk by engaging in religious practice, according to Garber. One the one hand, if Pascal is right, there is a kind of synchronic guarantee: wagering that God exists makes it very likely that one will eventually come to (synchronically, internally) rationally believe that God exists, whether or not God exists. This is because, by one's *post-wagering* lights, it will be rational to believe in God. But one also takes a diachronic risk: The process by which one comes to eventually (synchronically, internally) rationally believe that God exists is (diachronically, externally) rational only if, in fact, God exists. But you can't evaluate whether or not God exists other than by your current lights, which wagering itself transforms. Hence, if God does *not* exist, it seems that wagering will land one in an epistemically bad position; not only will one have a false belief, but one will be diachronically irrational. But worst of all, the fact that one is diachronically irrational will be *rationally inaccessible* to one after wagering, because it will be indistinguishable from one's position in the event that God does exist.

Garber's own novel question is how we should believe and act *after* wagering, given that we are aware of both our synchronic and diachronic positions. With respect to belief, Garber thinks that the post-wagering believer should continue to believe, though she should continually review her evidence in light of the live possibility that she is "in the grips of a cognitive illusion."[19] With respect to action, Garber thinks that—in light of the diachronic risk undertaken—the believer should be extremely cautious in her employment of post-conversion assumptions, at least when the stakes are high. Understood as a way of responding to transformative self-disagreement, we think that this response is consonant with conciliationist positions the literature on peer disagreement. The transformed believer (or skeptic) does not merely face the possibility of illusion. She faces that possibility, but she faces it partly because she faces disagreement with her own former self, who she has no grounds for assessing as anything other than an epistemic peer.

5. Conclusion
Although the problem of religious disagreement is a species of the general problem of peer disagreement, it brings with it special problems having to do with transformative experience. We have highlighted two such special problems. The first problem is that religious disagreement does

19 Garber, 53.

not consist in a mere conflict of beliefs, it consists in a conflict between different ways of being a person. This fact alone makes it intelligible and rational that one might resist full engagement with one's peers who disagree on religious matters. The second problem is that religious disagreement does not only exist between oneself and one's peers—it exists in a strong form across one's own selves. This suggests that the problem is even more serious than has been recognized, for unlike one's external peers, one cannot escape the specter of one's former, pre-transformed self.

References
Abraham, William. 2006. *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
Adams, Marilyn McCord. 1999. *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Carel, Havi and Ian Kidd and Richard Pettigrew. 2016. "Illness as Transformative Experience," Lancet 388:1152-1153.
De Cruz, Helen. 2018. "Religious Conversion, Transformative Experience, and Disagreement," *Philosophia Christi* 20(1): 265-275.
Garber, Daniel. 2009. *What Happens After Pascal's Wager: Living Faith and Rational Belief*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press.
Flew, Anthony. 2007. *There is a God*, Harper Collins.
James, William. 2004 (1902). *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. Touchstone.
McKinnon, Rachel. 2015. "Trans*formative Experiences," *Res Philosophica* 92 (2):419-440.
Moser, Paul K. 2008. *The Elusive God: Reorienting Religious Epistemology*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Oppenheimer, Mark. 2007. "The Turning of an Atheist," in *The New York Times Magazine* (https://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/04/magazine/04Flew-t.html).
Pascal, Blaise. 2005. *Pensées*. Roger Ariew (trans.). Indianapolis: Hackett.
Paul, L.A. 2015. "What You Can't Expect When You're Expecting," *Res Philosophica* 92 (2):1-23.
-----2014. *Transformative Experience*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Paul, L.A. and Kieran Healy. 2018. "Transformative Treatments," *Nous* 52 (2):320-335.
Paul, L.A. Forthcoming 2020. "Transformative religious experience and the paradox of empathy", *Episteme.*
Plantinga, Alvin. 2000. *Warranted Christian Belief*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Schellenberg, J.L. 2015. *The Hiddenness Argument: Philosophy's New Challenge to Belief in God*. Oxford University Press.
Thompson, Evan. Forthcoming. "Death: The Ultimate Transformative Experience," in [**untitled book in prep for OUP edited by Enoch Lambert and John Schwenkler—would this not go in bib?**]