

2006

## Self-Trust and the Diversity of Religions

Linda Zagzebski  
*University of Oklahoma*

Follow this and additional works at: [http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil\\_ex](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex)

 Part of the [Epistemology Commons](#), and the [Metaphysics Commons](#)

### Repository Citation

Zagzebski, Linda (2006) "Self-Trust and the Diversity of Religions," *Philosophic Exchange*: Vol. 36 : No. 1 , Article 1.  
Available at: [http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil\\_ex/vol36/iss1/1](http://digitalcommons.brockport.edu/phil_ex/vol36/iss1/1)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @Brockport. It has been accepted for inclusion in Philosophic Exchange by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @Brockport. For more information, please contact [kmyers@brockport.edu](mailto:kmyers@brockport.edu).



The College at  
**BROCKPORT**  
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK



*Linda Zagzebski*

# Self-Trust and the Diversity of Religions

Linda Zagzebski

## I. *The problem of religious disagreement*

The diversity of religions is widely regarded as one of the most serious problems for conscientious belief in a particular religion, both among ordinary people and among professional philosophers. The problem is not unique to religious belief because people have the same reaction to any instance of irresolvable disagreement. I think it is illuminating that this is not just a philosopher's puzzle. If the philosophically untutored think of it, that probably means there is something in ordinary beliefs and experiences that generates the problem. But since few, if any, people worried about it for millennia, those beliefs and experiences are probably modern in origin.

There are two modern sources of the perception that diversity is a threat. One is a principle about human nature that I believe we should reject, but the other is a kind of experience that we ought to take very seriously. I will argue that we should trust the experiences that generate the problem because of self-trust, and I think that the way out of the problem requires us to look more deeply at what self-trust commits us to.

At some time in the distant past, people probably began to realize that some of their most cherished beliefs conflicted with the beliefs of other groups of people, but for many centuries, nobody saw this as a problem for their own beliefs. They simply responded by saying, "We are right, and they disagree with us, so they are wrong, and that's the end of that." And some people still take that line. (And there are people who wouldn't dream of taking that line about religion who don't hesitate to take that line about other things, such as politics).

However, we are past the time when we can take this line in good faith. Ever since the much-maligned Enlightenment, the perception of the world in the West has changed irreversibly. People gave up the idea that each of us can treat our own point of view as epistemically privileged just because it is our own. The story of why we did that is interesting because I think it combines both an important advance in human sensibilities with at least one philosophical mistake.

An important assumption governing much of Enlightenment philosophy is intellectual egalitarianism, a position endorsed by John Locke.<sup>1</sup> The idea is that all normal human beings are roughly equal in the capacity to get knowledge. Aside from the fact that some have acquired greater expertise or have greater access to information in some fields, there are no epistemic elites. Given this assumption, I am not being epistemically honest if I treat my own viewpoint as

privileged. Locke combined his egalitarianism with optimism about the human ability to get knowledge, but there is a pessimistic interpretation that also comes from the Enlightenment. We could think of subjective points of view as equally bad ways to get the truth. All of them are limited and distorted, so it does no good to replace your own perspective with someone else's, equally limited and distorted. Notoriously, the Enlightenment enshrined the perspective of the impartial observer, a being without culture or history or personal preferences. But we also know that there are many disagreements in belief that cannot be resolved from such a perspective. If a conflict in belief can be resolved neither from the impartial perspective nor from the point of view of the disputants, and if I accept epistemic egalitarianism, I have to admit that my belief is no more likely to be true than the belief of my opponent. A conscientious believer finds this bothersome. Let me call this the Enlightenment worry: *'Irresolvable disagreement over a belief threatens the conscientiousness of the belief.'*

The Enlightenment worry is unstable for at least two reasons. One is that conscientiousness in belief has two aspects, only one of which is expressed in the worry over irresolvable disagreement. If we think disagreement threatens the conscientiousness of our beliefs, it is because we think that disagreement makes our own beliefs less likely to be true, and we might think we can escape the perceived threat to the truth of our belief if we withhold belief—neither believe nor disbelieve. But if we do that, we violate another demand of conscientiousness. A conscientious believer not only desires that the beliefs she has are true, she also desires to acquire beliefs in the domains she cares about as conscientiously as she can. To deny ourselves beliefs in important domains denies us important elements of a desirable life. People who do not have beliefs in important domains, who turn away from ultimate questions, tend to be shallow people. So one source of the instability of the Enlightenment worry is that it reflects one of the demands of conscientious belief but not the other.

There is another problem with the Enlightenment worry. The truth is, most of us are not epistemic egalitarians, and we would be hard pressed to defend egalitarianism if we wanted to. In particular, I don't think many of us worry about disagreements with people whom we do not admire. If you believe acts of terrorism or genocide are wrong (by whatever definition you want), I doubt that you think the conscientiousness of your belief is threatened when you find out there are people who disagree, even though you are not likely to resolve the conflict by talking it over with them. If you think that it is a bad idea to devote your life primarily to acquiring money and fame, I doubt that it will bother you to find out that there are people who think the contrary. Nor should it. What really bothers us, I think, is that we recognize admirable people among those who believe differently than we do about certain things and we observe that the beliefs of different exemplars conflict with each other. The exemplars I have in mind are people who have a sense of the importance of certain domains of

life and the beliefs needed to sustain those domains, and who are epistemically admirable in the way they believe as well as in the way they act.<sup>2</sup>

This version of the disagreement worry is also modern because sympathetic contact between people of different cultures only occurred on a large scale in the last few hundred years. That experience, I think, is much more important than the Enlightenment principles that allegedly threaten the conscientiousness of our beliefs. When we have direct and sympathetic contact with people of another culture, it is almost impossible not to notice that many of them are as admirable as the most admirable people in our own culture. So my position is that it is not irresolvable disagreement *per se* that causes a problem. What really worries us is irresolvable disagreement among people whom we admire and between people we admire and ourselves.

This form of the problem would not be threatening unless we ought to trust our emotion of admiration, and I think that we not only ought to, but have no choice but to do so. But to explain that, let me turn to some observations about self-trust.

## II. *Self-trust*

Richard Foley argues in his book, *Intellectual Trust in Oneself and Others* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), that any normal, non-skeptical life will have to include a significant degree of self-trust in our intellectual faculties, procedures, and opinions (99). The reason is that any defense of our most fundamental faculties and opinions will make use of those same faculties and opinions, so there are no non-question-begging guarantees of our own reliability. For example, we test our memory by perception, we test one perception by another perception, we test much of what we believe by consulting other people, so we use beliefs about them to test other beliefs, and so on. There is no way to get out of the circle of our faculties and opinions to test the reliability of the opinions and faculties in the circle.

Foley prefaces his observation about the need for self-trust with the claim that there is no answer to the radical skeptic and the project of classical foundationalism has failed. The proper reaction to that, he says, is to accept it and to acknowledge the consequence that intellectual inquiry always involves a substantial element of trust in our own faculties and the opinions they generate. But I think we need not accept Foley's contention that there is no answer to the radical skeptic in order to agree with his view on the need for self-trust. There are many kinds and degrees of skepticism, and no matter what you think of global skepticism, we are still left with concerns about the reliability of our faculties and the trustworthiness of our beliefs, and Foley's point about the lack of non-circular tests for our reliability seems to me to be justified independent of his views on global skepticism.

Foley gives an interesting argument that self-trust logically commits us to trust in others. He begins by defining three positions with respect to epistemic trust, each of which has an ethical analogue (85-89).<sup>3</sup> The first is *epistemic universalism*. According to the epistemic universalist, *the fact that someone else has a belief gives me some reason to believe it*. That reason may be outweighed by other reasons; nonetheless, the fact that another person has a certain belief is a mark in favor of its credibility. The ethical analogue is the position that the interests and goals of other persons always count morally for me. Again, they can be outweighed by some other value, but they should always count in my deliberations.

What Foley calls egoists and egotists reject universalism. The *epistemic egoist* maintains that *the fact that someone else has a belief can be a reason for me to believe it, but only if I have evidence that the person is reliable, that is, I have evidence that her beliefs will further my desire for the truth*. So I may believe what another person believes on her say-so, but only because I have information that her beliefs are reliably calibrated with truth in the domain in which she is making the claim.

This view also has an ethical analogue. The ethical egoist says I may care about the interests of others, but only when I adopt their interests as my own interests. The egoist insists that I am under no obligation to care about somebody else's interests, and I am not irrational if I do not. But sometimes I take an interest in their interests. Similarly, the epistemic egoist says that I am not irrational if I pay no attention to what another person believes, but sometimes I see for myself that what she believes serves my interest in getting the truth because I see for myself that she is reliable. So notice that for both kinds of egoist I have no reason to pay attention to what somebody else says or to their interests unless I see that what they say serves my interests; I see (or decide) that their interests are my interests.

The most extreme position identified by Foley is *epistemic egotism* (86). Epistemic egotists maintain that *it is never rational to grant credibility to the opinions of others simply because it is their opinion*. The only legitimate way for someone else to influence my beliefs is through Socratic demonstration. Anyone who wants to convince me of her belief must demonstrate to me that, given what I already believe, her opinion is one I ought to adopt, but it is never reasonable for me to believe what she believes on her say-so.

This is the analogue of ethical egotism, the view that I should not adopt the interests of others as my interests just because they are their interests. If I act in the interest of others, that is because my interests and theirs happen to coincide, but the mere fact that something is in their interests ought to play no part in my deliberations. Similarly, the epistemic egotist says that I might believe what somebody else believes, but the fact that she believes it ought to play no part in my reasons for believing it.

Now Foley argues that self-trust makes both epistemic egoism and epistemic

egotism incoherent. Because of the social construction of belief, if we have basic trust in our own opinions and intellectual faculties, we cannot coherently withhold trust from others because in so far as the opinions of others have shaped our own opinions, we would not be reliable unless they are. And this trust is not limited to people who preceded us historically. If our contemporaries were shaped by many of the same conditions that shaped us, then on pain of inconsistency, if I trust myself, I should trust them.

But Foley does not stop there. He argues that even though we tend to be fascinated with differences between people and we like to exaggerate them, there are many more commonalities than differences in human faculties and environment. In fact, the similarities extend to people all over the world at all times. So the fact that some person somewhere at some time has a certain belief gives me *some* reason to believe it myself, given that I have trust in myself and I am relevantly similar to them. Self-trust therefore commits me to universalism (103), but notice that Foley assumes epistemic egalitarianism to get the conclusion. Self-trust, together with epistemic egalitarianism, requires me to accept epistemic universalism. The conclusion is that given that I have reason to believe that someone else believes *p*, I have at least a weak reason to believe *p* myself. I do not need to know anything special about the reliability of the person. (105) Self-trust commits me to trust others unless I have reason to think they are unreliable. I need special reason not to trust them. I do not need special reason to trust them.

Now suppose that I have a belief that conflicts with the belief of another. Foley argues that my belief defeats the belief of the other person because by my lights the other person has been unreliable (108). Since it is trust in myself that creates in me a presumption of trust in another, then unless I have evidence that the other person is more reliable than I am (e.g., the other person is a medical specialist and I am not), my trust in that other is defeated by my trust in myself. Notice first that the fact that someone else has a belief that conflicts with one of mine is not evidence that the other person is unreliable. After all, it is only a single case. But more importantly, notice that Foley's treatment of the conflict case makes him an epistemic egoist in such cases, although he does not say that in his book. In order to trust the other person, I need evidence that he is more reliable than I am, but I do not need evidence that I am more reliable than he is in order to trust myself. That is epistemic egoism. Yet according to his own argument, I would not be reliable unless the other is.<sup>4</sup>

Foley says nothing about religion in his book, but we can easily apply his points to religious belief. The *religious epistemic egotist* would be a person who accepts no religious belief on the word of another. He expects a demonstration of the existence of God that uses premises he accepts himself, and he will accept the beliefs of a particular religion only if the same conditions can be satisfied for each doctrine of the religion. It is very unlikely that these conditions can

be satisfied by any religion. Theism might satisfy these conditions for some people and atheism for others, whereas still others will be convinced neither by arguments for atheism nor by arguments for theism and will become agnostic. Religious epistemic egotism puts the agnostic in the position of either caring very much about a domain about which he does not have conscientiously acquired beliefs, thereby violating one of the demands of conscientiousness I mentioned earlier, or perhaps more likely, it leads him to cease to care. I suspect that many contemporary atheists and agnostics satisfy this definition of a religious epistemic egotist.

The less extreme *religious epistemic egoist* will accept religious beliefs on the word of another provided that there is good evidence of the reliability of the source. John Locke is an epistemic egoist about belief in Christianity. Locke defines Revelation as a communication from God, and faith as the acceptance of beliefs on the word of God.<sup>5</sup> Locke says we have good evidence that the Gospels are a communication from God, given the miracles performed by Jesus. We have reason to believe the miracles occurred in the same way we have reason to believe testimony about other historical occurrences. Miracles are evidence that the source of the teachings of Jesus is divine, and hence, is reliable.

For the egoist, belief in particular Christian teachings does not require demonstration of the content of the revelation, as it does for the egotist. But reason judges whether something is a revelation, that is, whether it is reliable. And Locke allows that it can be rational to believe a revelation even when the content is improbable. He says that is to be expected since revelation is about matters above the limit of our faculties to attain on our own, such as the revelation that the angels rebelled against God.

I think Foley is correct that epistemic egotism and epistemic egoism are not coherent positions, given that we have self-trust, and his argument applies to religious epistemic egotism and egoism. I think this is an interesting consequence because both positions are so common. But given Foley's egalitarianism, the only option left is universalism, so the position to which we are committed by self-trust, according to Foley's argument, is religious epistemic universalism. The *religious epistemic universalist* would grant *prima facie* credence to the religious beliefs of all other persons.

I find Foley's approach to self-trust generally helpful, but unfortunately, I don't think it is helpful in giving the conscientious believer guidance in cases of conflict. For people who already have religious beliefs (or anti-religious beliefs), self-trust means that my own belief trumps the belief of others, assuming I am being careful. I assume they are unreliable because they disagree with me, and as I've said, this view reduces to epistemic egoism. Furthermore, I think it is too much like the "I'm right so they must be wrong" view that I've said we can no longer support.

What about cases in which a person is agnostic in religious matters? In



that case Foley's position also is not very helpful because the agnostic can't choose between conflicting religious beliefs without evidence of the relative reliability of one group over another – atheists, deists, Christians, Buddhists, etc. —in order to adjudicate the conflict, and it's not likely that she is going to get that. So Foley's approach is not helpful whether or not a person already has religious beliefs. Still, I think a closer look at self-trust reveals something interesting both about the source of the worry over religious diversity and the way a person who trusts herself ought to proceed.

### III. *Emotional self-trust and conflict*

In my judgment Foley is right that any non-skeptical intellectual life must include a substantial amount of self-trust in whatever aspects of ourselves produce or support our beliefs. What those aspects are depends upon the nature of the self and what you think that is is one of the things you need to trust. Foley limits the aspects of the self that are relevant to epistemic self-trust to cognitive and perceptual faculties and a set of beliefs one already has, but I think they must include more than that. Foley does not mention emotions, but I think we must trust our emotions for the same reason we must trust our perceptual faculties, memory, and beliefs. Emotion dispositions can be reliable or unreliable and particular emotions may fit or not fit their objects. But we can't tell whether our emotion dispositions are reliable without using those same dispositions in conjunction with our other faculties. How can we tell whether our disposition to pity is reliably directed at the pitiful, whether our disposition to disgust is reliably directed towards the disgusting, whether we reliably fear the fearsome, or admire the admirable without appealing to further emotions? We trust what we think we see when we take a hard look in good environmental conditions, and if others agree, we take that as confirmation. Similarly, we trust what we feel when we feel admiration or pity or revulsion and we take the agreement of others as confirmation. So the grounds for trusting our emotions are parallel to the grounds for trusting our perceptions and memory.

Emotions are the ground of many beliefs that lead to action, so trust in those beliefs depends upon trusting an emotion. Fear of a situation grounds the belief that I ought to escape. Compassion for a person grounds the belief that we ought to give her aid. Respect for a person grounds the belief that we may not treat her in certain ways, and so on. So the self-trust we need in order to act requires trust in beliefs that depend upon trust in emotions. If epistemic self-trust includes trust in the beliefs that ground action, then epistemic self-trust requires emotional self-trust. It follows that to live a normal, non-skeptical life we need to trust our emotions as well as our faculties, procedures, and beliefs. Our emotions are therefore within the set of faculties, procedures, and beliefs whose reliability we need to depend upon but whose reliability we cannot test

in a non-circular way.

Foley says that we need to trust the beliefs we have that we acquired at some time in the distant past that we can't remember. And he concludes from that that we must trust the people from whom we acquired those beliefs. But more follows from that observation as well. Many beliefs are not just passed along from one person to the next like a virus. Beliefs are imbedded in traditions from which we both acquire and learn how to interpret the beliefs, so trusting those beliefs commits me to trusting the traditions from which I acquired them. If I am a little slice of history, trusting myself commits me to trusting the longer span of history of which I am a part. So one modification I want to make to Foley's line of reasoning about self-trust is to extend it in two ways. In addition to trusting our faculties, procedures, and beliefs, we also need emotional self-trust, and we need trust in traditions and historical institutions from which we acquire our beliefs and learn how to interpret our experience.

To trust an emotion means to have confidence that the emotion is appropriate for the circumstances. In my theory of emotion an emotion is an affective state whose intentional object is seen as falling under a distinctive thick affective concept, so pity is feeling pity for someone seen as pitiful, love is loving someone seen as lovable, contempt is feeling contempt for someone seen as contemptible, reverence is revering what is seen as sacred, admiration is admiring someone seen as admirable.<sup>6</sup> The admirable cannot be understood apart from the feeling that is a component of the emotion of admiration, but we can say something about the admirable. I think it is something like the imitably attractive. We feel a positive emotion towards the person we admire that would lead to imitating the person given the right practical conditions. To trust the emotion of admiration, then, means to have confidence that it is appropriate to feel the kind of attraction and desire to imitate that is intrinsic to admiration.

Notice, however, that even though self-trust is a crucial part of any non-skeptical life, we do not trust ourselves equally all the time, and this applies both to our beliefs and to our emotions. Suppose that I give up in adulthood a belief I had as a child. I think the later belief is better than the earlier one. Similarly, if I have a different emotion in a certain situation in adulthood than I had as a child, I think the later emotion is more appropriate. I believe that my older self is more trustworthy than my younger self, and I believe *that* primarily because I trust my older self more than my younger self. There are defenses for this attitude, but the defenses also require self-trust. For example, we might think that other things being equal, greater experience is more trustworthy than less experience, but that also is not something for which we have a non-circular defense.

I also trust some of my current beliefs more than others. I trust the beliefs I have when carefully reflecting, considering open-mindedly contrary views,

treating opponents fairly, and not indulging in strong emotional reactions which tend to distort beliefs into extremes. So I trust beliefs arising from my intellectual virtues and not those arising from vices. It is probably true that I have a better track record of getting the truth when my beliefs are formed in the virtuous ways I've mentioned rather than in vicious ways, but there is still no non-circular way for me to tell that the virtuously formed beliefs are the reliable ones. That is because my final decision about what the truth is in some case is determined by what I believe when I'm being as virtuous as I can.<sup>7</sup>

I trust some of my emotions more than others for the same reason I trust some of my beliefs more than others. I trust the ones that are stable, do not change upon reflection, and which do not arise from vices. Again, there is no non-circular way to tell that the virtuously formed and stable emotions are the trustworthy ones since I need emotions to tell whether a previous emotion was trustworthy.

But if there are no non-circular grounds for trusting some of my beliefs and emotions more than others, why is it that I trust myself more in some circumstances than in others? The answer, I think, is that I admire myself more when I am behaving in an intellectually virtuous way than when I am not. Self-admiration is not an emotion we are comfortable with and I hesitate to use the term because of its connotations of vanity and conceit,<sup>8</sup> but I think it is fairly obvious that if we are capable of admiring and not admiring others, we are capable of admiring and not admiring ourselves. We trust ourselves more in some of our beliefs than in others because we admire the way we came to believe some of our beliefs more than others. Again I want to make it clear that I do not treat my intellectual virtues as evidence that I am admirable and have grounds for trusting myself. Being trustworthy is not something I infer about myself in a non-circular way, nor is being admirable.

Now if I am consistent, I admire the way some people form some of their beliefs more than I admire the way I form some of my beliefs, and so consistency requires me to trust the beliefs of others formed in these ways more than my own when my own are not admirable. So self-trust commits me to trusting more than myself those who are more admirable than myself, who have the traits I trust in myself in a greater degree than I have myself.

This means we must reject intellectual egalitarianism. We know that there are people who are generally more virtuous than others in epistemic behavior. So my trust is not universal, and its non-universality is based on the way I treat trust in myself. And this explains why I do not trust those who are not admirable. I do not trust the beliefs of terrorists about terrorism, not because I have evidence of their unreliability, but because I don't admire them. The difference between those we trust intellectually and those we do not cannot be explained by the fact that we have evidence of the reliability of the admirable and the unreliability of the non-admirable. So the position I am endorsing is

not a form of epistemic egoism.

I think, then, that Foley is right that epistemic egotism and egoism are incompatible with self-trust, but epistemic egalitarianism, which Foley uses to support epistemic universalism, must be rejected. So I differ from Foley's position in two further respects: (1) I think that self-trust leads to trusting the people I admire more than the people I do not admire and the difference does not rest upon the fact that I have evidence of the greater reliability of the former. (2) I maintain that self-trust commits me to trusting some other people more than myself. I am forced to these conclusions by trusting my own emotion of admiration.

Now let us return to conflict in beliefs. Suppose that I trust my emotion of admiration of some person more than I trust a given belief I have. Maybe I do not admire the way I formed my own belief as much as I admire the way the other person formed hers. And suppose the other person's belief conflicts with mine, and I am not aware of another person I admire just as much whose belief agrees with mine. Self-trust would lead me to trust the admired person's belief more than my own. If I am able to imitate the admired person by adopting her belief without changing anything else about myself that I trust even more than I trust my admiration for her, then self-trust should lead me to change my belief. For example, suppose that I hastily form a belief about a recently published book without reading it, and then become aware of a contrary opinion about the book by an acquaintance whose intellectual judgment I admire and who has clearly made a more careful study of the book than I have. If I am not aware of anyone else I admire just as much whose opinion agrees with mine, and if I can change my belief without changing anything else about myself I trust more than I trust the judgment of my acquaintance, then I probably should change my belief.

This seems to me the right thing to do for beliefs that are not deeply embedded in the self. I think, then, that Foley is mistaken in saying that self-trust will always lead me to decide a conflict between my belief and the belief of another in favor of my own.

But even if I trust my admiration for another person more than I trust my belief, it does not always follow that I should change it. Whether I should change a belief is not simply determined by how much I trust the belief itself, but how much I trust the other aspects of myself that I would have to change if I changed the belief. Foley emphasizes the social construction of belief, but as I've pointed out, that commits me to trusting much more than the individual persons from whom I learned the belief. To trust myself commits me to trusting the traditions that shape me and the institutions on which I depend. Religious beliefs are usually connected with an entire network of other beliefs as well as religious emotions, experiences, communal loyalties, and connections with many other admirable people, all of which I trust. Admiration is an emotion

that leads me to imitate the admirable person in suitable circumstances, but often the circumstances are not suitable. So I can admire the belief system of a Hindu without the inclination to adopt that system for myself.

Suppose, however, that I trust my admiration for the Hindu more than I trust the aspects of myself I would have to change if I imitated the Hindu by adopting her religion. I still might not imitate her because it might not be possible. Just as I can admire an Olympic swimmer without the slightest inclination to imitate her, I can admire a devout Hindu without the inclination to imitate, and the reason is the same in both cases: I can't do it. But some people can. It is possible to convert to another religion, and I would not accept any position on religious diversity that rules out conversion for the conscientious believer.

If I convert to Hinduism, there is a sense in which I can imitate the devout Hindu and a sense in which I cannot because what one converts to is never what one sees when one admires an exemplar from a radically different culture. When I see an admirable person with a very different belief system, I see an alternate self. I don't mean that *that* person is an alternate self. Rather, I mean that I know that if I had met that person at an early age, I might have imitated her because then I might have trusted her more than I trusted my conflicting beliefs. If so, I would be a very different person today. And even now becoming an alternate self is still an option through conversion. So respect for admirable others in other religions includes recognition of an alternate self. This forever changes the way I relate to them. But I only get one life. I might respect the self I could have been, but it does not follow that I should now try to become that self. I *might* trust my alternate Hindu self more than my present self, in which case I should convert, but given the nature of self-trust, we would expect conversion on that scale to be rare, and I am arguing that that is perfectly compatible with conscientiousness.

In a situation in which a choice whether to convert is made, some element of self-trust becomes the bottom line— that to which we refer in adjudicating between those elements of ourselves that pull us one way and those that pull in another direction. Lee Yearley gives a brief but moving account of this process in himself while contemplating an enormous Buddha and imagining what it would be like to become a Buddhist. Yearley writes: —“I could imagine attempting to incarnate the excellences I saw in the Sokkurum Buddha that morning in Korea. I admired them, they tempted me, and I believe I could have chosen them and remained myself. But I did not want to choose them, and I hoped that those about whom I most care would not choose them.” (247)<sup>9</sup>

Notice Yearley does not say he didn't want to become a Buddhist because he thinks his Christian beliefs are true and Buddhist beliefs are false. Presumably, he *did* think that, but that is not sufficient to explain why he would not become a Buddhist. As long as it was possible for him to change his beliefs, given his admiration for another religion, imitation of that religion was possible. And

Yearley might have been conscientious if he did become a Buddhist on that morning in Korea. If his admiration for Buddhism had been strong enough and he had trusted it more than the other aspects of himself he would have had to change if he became a Buddhist, I think he would have been a conscientious believer. But he didn't change, and his reason seems to me not only to show a high degree of self-knowledge, but it gives us a hint about how self-trust often operates. He genuinely admires Buddhism, but he does not like the self he would become if he converted to Buddhism, nor does he want those he loves the most to adopt such a self. He does not try to find some *reason* to reject Buddhism either in its doctrines or its way of life. I am assuming that he has already thought through the reasons and still admires Buddhism. The bottom line is that he doesn't *like* himself as a Buddhist. He trusts that emotion, and I not only think that he can be conscientious in doing so, but I've tried to show that he has few other options. Whatever he does, there will be some element of the self to which he defers in a situation of this kind.

The problem of this paper is therefore a conflict that arises within self-trust. I trust my admiration of others and my other emotions, and I trust the aspects of myself from which I gain my beliefs and the traditions that support them. I think this conflict produces a genuine problem of religious diversity. In contrast, the problem that arises from an assumption of intellectual egalitarianism seems to me to be much less threatening because I have less reason to trust egalitarianism than to trust my emotions. So I am not much taken with the well-known argument that says, "Other people are as well placed to get the truth as we are. There is an irresolvable conflict between their beliefs and ours. Hence, we have no more reason to think our beliefs are true than that their beliefs are true." This is what I called the Enlightenment Worry. What I do take seriously is the admiration I have for alternate ways of life and the beliefs that go with them. I may have full confidence in my beliefs, emotions, and their sources in the traditions that shape me, and I am conscientious in doing so. But as long as I trust my emotion of admiration and admiration includes the urge to imitate, conversion is also compatible with conscientiousness, and the diversity of religions will put some people in the position of making a choice, a position that puts those aspects of herself she trusts the most in the forefront of her consciousness.

Admiration may not require me to change my beliefs, but it adds something to the dialogue between people with conflicting religious beliefs that did not exist in the pre-modern era. What it adds, I think, is the feeling that I *would* imitate them if I had grown up with a different social construction of the self. That prevents me from taking the line, "We're right, so they're wrong, and that's the end of that." Of course, we think we're right, but there's more to be said. Respect for others comes from trusting that we *are* right in the admiration we have for many people who have very different beliefs, and *that* logically

requires us to think of them as like the self I could have been if I had been raised in a different way.

Admiration is a tricky emotion. On the one hand, it is of central importance to the moral life because most of what we learn is by imitation and admiration is the emotion we use to distinguish those who are worthy of imitation from those who are not. But admiration raises the problem of the boundaries of the self. We would not want to imitate every admirable person in every way they are admirable, even if it were possible, which it isn't. There is a domain of the self that does not respond by imitation even when the admiration is genuine. Many of our central beliefs are in that domain. The problem of conflict between our own beliefs and the beliefs of those we admire reflects the complexity of admiration. We *are* inclined to imitate the admirable beliefs of others, but we are also right to know the difference between being as admirable as *we* can be and trying to become another person.

*University of Oklahoma*

### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *John Locke and the Ethics of Belief* (Cambridge University Press, 1996) for a recent interpretation of Locke's epistemology.

<sup>2</sup>I have argued elsewhere that the ability to sense the important affects the ethics of belief and blurs the lines between moral and intellectual exemplars. See "Epistemic Value and the Primacy of What We Care About," in *Immoral Believing* (special issue of *Philosophical Papers*, edited by Ward Jones, 2005).

<sup>3</sup>The ethical analogues play no role in either Foley's argument or mine, but I mention them because they are interesting.

<sup>4</sup>Foley has said in conversation that he has changed his mind about the conflict situation.

<sup>5</sup>*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Chap. 19, "Faith and reason." See also Locke's *Discourse of Miracles*.

<sup>6</sup>For a fuller account of this theory of emotion, see "Emotion and Moral Judgment," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, January 2003, pp. 104-124, and *Divine Motivation Theory* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), chap. 2.

<sup>7</sup>I am not suggesting that truth is *defined* as what I believe when I am being as careful as I can.

a tendency to imitate, which I think is included in admiration. We want to imitate our better selves as well as admirable others.

<sup>9</sup>Yearley, L., “Conflicts among ideals of human flourishing,” in Outka, G. & Reeder, J., Jr. (eds.) *Prospects for a Common Morality* (Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 231-253.