Conversion, Causes, and Closed-Mindedness

ABSTRACT: *'You just believe that because you were raised to believe it!' is a familiar criticism. Many converts, however, believe the opposite of what they were raised to believe. Does this make them immune to these challenges? I scrutinize this 'conversion defense'. If these challenges only concern belief genealogy, a certain kind of convert is immune to them. However, these challenges often concern closed-mindedness rather than genealogy. Seen in this light, the convert who is immune to the genealogical critique may be* more *susceptible to these challenges due to her conversion. Her conversion may make her more likely to engage in 'epistemic self-licensing' akin to the empirically documented phenomenon of 'moral self-licensing'.*

KEYWORDS: conversion, closed-mindedness, self-licensing, genealogy, epistemic virtue and vice

> *We reimburse ourselves for cuffs and toil with a double dose of self-esteem.*
> —C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* ([1955] 2012: 107)

Introduction

Suppose you are arguing with an extreme fundamentalist Christian about issues related to morality and religion. 'Children get cancer as punishment for human sin', he says; 'rape not only *could* be moral, it has been. God commanded it in the Old Testament!' After arguing against this person's beliefs by presenting your best counterarguments and your strongest counterevidence, he remains unmoved. Finally, you insist, 'you just believe that because you were raised to trust the Bible. If you hadn't been raised that way, you wouldn't believe this!' Now imagine your interlocutor responds in the following way: 'You're wrong: I was raised to believe the exact opposite. I'm a convert. My parents were atheists, and for most of my life, I was, too'. Should this response satisfy you? Does citing conversion answer your challenge?

It depends on how these challenges should be understood. They are naturally interpreted as attempts to discredit a belief by highlighting its allegedly problematic *genealogy* (Srinivasan 2011) (see below, section 2). If that were the whole story, then we would only need to know whether conversion is a respectable belief origin. However, I argue that the feature these challenges often aim to identify is *current closed-mindedness* rather than discrediting genealogy (section 3). Thus, the question becomes whether converts can cite their conversion to rebut charges of closed-mindedness. I argue that conversion on its own cannot be used to rebut these charges because even the most epistemically respectable conversions can lead converts to closed-mindedness (section 4). In particular, an open-minded conversion can lead the convert to adopt a worldview that encourages closed-mindedness, and it can place the convert at risk of developing closed-minded tendencies via a process resembling 'moral self-licensing'. The upshot is that conversion does not shield converts from all 'you just believe that because' challenges. Having avoided epistemic vice and even demonstrated epistemic virtue in the past, in converting from one worldview to another, is no sure indication that the convert is currently avoiding closed-mindedness in how she maintains her beliefs. And this is what these challenges are often about.

Why care about whether citing conversion answers these challenges? My interest stems in part from common worries about the social and moral threats posed by fundamental, partisan, and polarized divisions in belief. I suspect many of these divisions arise from criticizable individual and social practices that entrench belief, rather than from reasonable, virtuous assessments of relevant considerations. Moreover, I worry that the social and moral costs of these divisions are unacceptably high. For these reasons, I am interested in uncovering ways to reduce divisions in belief. Because converts are people who have changed their minds about fundamental issues, looking to them for clues on how to reduce these divisions strikes me as a promising strategy (DiPaolo 2018). But I want to be clear-eyed about this. It is easy to fall into the trap of overestimating the credentials of your favorite convert, whether that is someone else or yourself. For instance, C. S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist and erstwhile atheist, has many admirers who see his conversion to Christianity as evincing his intellectual integrity and open-mindedness. I am suspicious of this for several reasons, some of which I discuss below. I think we should probe the intellectual credentials of converts to see what we can learn from them, but also what, if anything, we need to be wary of. I argue even the most epistemically respectable conversion does not inoculate converts against 'you just believe that because' challenges.

1. Conversion

What is conversion? I begin with William James's definition of religious conversion: 'It makes a great difference to a man . . . as regards any set of ideas which he may possess, whether they become central or remain peripheral in him. To say a man is "converted" means, in these terms, that religious ideas, previously peripheral in his consciousness, now take a central place' (1902: 162).

There are two basic elements here: sets of ideas and a space where these ideas are located. That space includes more and less privileged locations. Suppose there is a single privileged location occupied by the ideas, beliefs, and methods of interpretation that are fundamental to a person's outlook. On this view, conversion occurs when one set of ideas replaces a competing set in this privileged location. Depending on your preferred metaphor, you might say conversions constitute changes to the foundations or to the core of the web of belief.

However, this oversimplifies things, as conversions are matters of degree. While mundane changes of mind about the weather do not count, the shift from theism to atheism does. In between these there will be more or less momentous changes of mind. The more central or fundamental the ideas are to a person's outlook, the more deserving the shift will be of the conversion label.

'Damascene conversions' are sudden, dramatic experiences, so-called because Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is the paradigm. As the story goes, Paul immediately converts to Christianity after being blinded by divine light and communicating with God. Conversions need not be Damascene. They can be gradual and undramatic.

Thus, conversions are more or less radical changes in worldview. Worldviews are interdependent propositions concerning what the world is like and how it works. Changes in worldview are often changes in beliefs that partly constitute our identities. We should distinguish 'substantive' conversions, which are my focus, from 'formal' ones: substantive conversions occur when one becomes a true believer, whereas formal occur when one takes steps to be formally admitted into some group, whether or not one's beliefs have changed. We can call the position to which someone converts their 'new worldview'. Conversions include major shifts in belief from theism to atheism, political liberalism to political conservatism, racism to egalitarianism, geocentricism to heliocentrism, and so on. As this list indicates, my interest extends beyond religious conversion. However, I focus on religious conversion because it is the most familiar case.

Occasionally throughout history, religious philosophers have reflected on the epistemic significance of conversion. Joseph Butler (1897: 269–70) argues that the fact that so many who claimed to witness Christ's miracles converted to Christianity despite the hardship of conversion is evidence of those miracles. George Berkeley suggests a convert's testimony has special epistemic force: 'if the finger of God and the force of truth converted both the one and the other from Judaism or gentileism, in spite of their prejudices to Christianity', he asks, 'is not their testimony so much the stronger?' ([1732] 1803: 317). But, as James notes, it is not all about religion. Damascene conversions, at least, should be of interest to everyone: 'Were we writing the story of the mind from the purely natural history point of view, with no religious interests whatever, we should still have to write down man's liability to sudden and complete conversion as one of his most curious peculiarities' (1902: 160). Following these thinkers, I probe the epistemic significance of conversion. But I do not consider here what conversion implies about miracles or the truth of any worldviews adopted by converts. Rather, I scrutinize the 'conversion defense' in order to clarify converts' epistemic credentials.

2. Conversion and Genealogy

We often criticize people or their beliefs by insisting they just believe something because . . . (fill in some allegedly epistemically irrelevant factor surrounding their beliefs). I refer to these critiques as 'explanatory challenges' because they attempt to challenge the target beliefs by providing an undermining explanation of why the person holds, or came to hold, them. (In the literature, these critiques are usually called 'etiological challenges', but I prefer 'explanatory challenge' because it does not presuppose that these challenges primarily concern etiology.) Below, I develop an argument—which I will ultimately reject—that favors the conversion defense. The two key premises are that all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges and that converts' beliefs in their new worldviews have epistemically respectable genealogies.

When introduced, explanatory challenges are standardly framed in terms of upbringing:

> The fact that you were raised in this community rather than that one is neither here nor there when it comes to what you ought to believe about God, morality, or presidential candidates. Yet factors like upbringing inevitably guide our convictions on these and other, less charged, topics. The effect is not always straightforward . . . but it is disturbing either way. (Vavova, 2018: 134)

> We each proposed arguments that challenged the other's beliefs, responded to them, deemed the other's responses unsatisfactory, and neither of us budged. As a last attempt, I said to her: 'Look, you must realize if you had grown up somewhere else, you would not have all of these beliefs. You only believe as you do because of the influence of the people around you. How, then, can you be so sure you are right?' This thought, which had clearly occurred to her in the past, she found deeply troubling. I have another friend . . . who once told me the only challenge to his faith that ever *really* concerned him was the fact that his beliefs were caused by the community he was raised in. (Schoenfield, 2014: 193)

Framing explanatory challenges in this way invites the conversion defense: the alleged irrelevant factor did not influence the person's outlook as evidenced by the facts that (1) she converted later in life to this new worldview and (2) that factor was not operative in the conversion process. This defense appears compelling when explanatory challenges focus explicitly on upbringing or the community a person was raised in and when her worldview stands in stark contrast to the worldviews endorsed by those responsible for her upbringing. 'No, I don't believe this just because I was raised to believe it. I was raised to believe the exact opposite!' sounds convincing and conclusive.

Explanatory challenges framed in terms of upbringing look like *genealogical* challenges. A genealogical challenge is an explanatory challenge that claims (1) the target beliefs have a particular genealogy or origin and (2) any belief with that genealogy is epistemically problematic. (We could analyze 'epistemically problematic'

in several ways, such as false, unjustified, irrational, or non-knowledge. I leave this open here because I am not questioning whether, or in what ways, beliefs with the relevant origins are problematic.) There is, of course, a long tradition—linked to thinkers like Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud—devoted to developing genealogical challenges against a wide range of beliefs (Leiter 2004). More recently, Amia Srinivasan (2011: 1) has analyzed explanatory challenges explicitly in terms of 'genealogical anxiety', the worry that the origins of one's beliefs will turn out to be a source of discredit, not vindication. Evolutionary debunkers work with a similar conception (Joyce 2006; Street 2006). Others writing on this topic also seem to understand explanatory challenges as genealogical challenges. Yuval Avnur and Dion Scott-Kakures (2015: 7) claim irrelevant influences "pose a distinctively genealogical challenge." The accounts in my article with Robert Mark Simpson (2016) and Katia Vavova's (2018) also look genealogical: Simpson and I link the worry to the concern that one's beliefs have their origins in a program of indoctrination, while Vavova argues the worry is about unreliable belief formation. Perhaps, then, these authors have all identified something essential. Perhaps *all* explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges.

There are two parts to an explanatory challenge: (1) the explanation of why the person holds, or came to hold, the target beliefs; and (2) the claim that accurately explaining beliefs in this way renders them problematic. Accordingly, there are two ways to rebut explanatory challenges. The first, which I set aside, involves showing that even if the explanation is correct, this does not render the belief problematic. The other, which will be my focus, involves showing that the proposed explanation actually *does not* explain why the person holds the belief. As I have shown, this is how the conversion defense works: conversion is cited as evidence that the explanation—that the person believes what they do because they were raised to believe it—is not correct. For some, it may be helpful to understand this in terms of defeaters. The conversion defense implies conversion is a defeater-defeater: if an explanatory challenge provides an agent with a defeater, then that defeater is itself defeated by the agent's awareness of her conversion. How general is this defense?

No one thinks *every* genealogy or belief origin is a source of discredit. We can distinguish epistemically 'respectable' genealogies from 'unrespectable' ones, where the latter are sources of discredit: if a belief has an unrespectable origin, then the belief is epistemically problematic. If all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges, then if the conversion process leading a convert to adopt belief in her new worldview never involves an unrespectable genealogy, then conversion can be cited to rebut any explanatory challenge. To know whether conversion can be cited to rebut any explanatory challenge, then, we need to know which genealogies are unrespectable, and whether converts' beliefs have these genealogies.

I consider three prominent accounts of the genealogical defect highlighted by explanatory challenges: indoctrination (DiPaolo and Simpson 2016), motivated reasoning (Avnur and Scott-Kakures 2015), and unreliable belief formation (Vavova 2018). I assume for the sake of argument that these are, indeed, unrespectable genealogies. (However, I do *not* assume the only epistemic worries these processes give rise to are genealogical in nature. See section 3.2, below.) In order to delineate the limits of the conversion defense, I also consider three types

of conversion: indoctrinating, voluntaristic, and reflective. Consideration of indoctrinating and voluntaristic conversion shows that conversion cannot be cited to rebut *every* explanatory challenge. On the other hand, consideration of reflective conversion will suggest reflective conversions *can* be cited to rebut every explanatory challenge *if* all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges since reflective conversion is a respectable genealogy. However, as I argue in the next section, the conversion defense is more limited than this argument suggests because not all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges.

Begin with the indoctrination account of explanatory challenges. On this view, the defect highlighted by explanatory challenges is that the targeted beliefs resulted from a systematic program of doctrinal inculcation (DiPaolo and Simpson 2016: 3082). How indoctrination works is controversial (Callan and Arena 2009; DiPaolo and Simpson 2016: 3086–89). But indoctrinating practices often use methods that bypass agents' critical faculties, inducing belief through affective means or means that exploit agents' critical deficiencies, leading people to closed-mindedly cling to the inculcated beliefs.

Some conversions involve indoctrination. For instance, a 'coercive conversion', according to John Lofland and Norman Skonovd, 'entails an extremely high degree of external pressure over a relatively long period of time, during which there is intense arousal of fear and uncertainty, culminating in empathetic identification and even love' (1981: 383) for the new worldview and its adherents. It follows that some conversions involve unrespectable genealogies, and therefore, that the conversion defense is limited. Conversion cannot be cited to rebut every explanatory challenge. Whether conversion can be cited to rebut an explanatory challenge depends on the characteristics of the conversion process.

The second account of explanatory challenges identifies motivated reasoning as an unrespectable genealogy. On this view, explanatory challenges suggest your desires have a 'directional influence' that causes your '*handling of the evidence* to favor a particular, predetermined outcome, where the desires that determine the favored outcome go beyond mere interest in believing the truth' (Avnur and Scott-Kakures 2015: 12).

Some conversions involve motivated reasoning. Imagine an agnostic who aims to induce her own conversion to Christianity because she feels overwhelmed by the universe's potential meaninglessness. Accepting Pascal's (1660: 49) advice of immersion, she attends Mass, takes holy water, and isolates herself from detractors. Such voluntaristic conversions—in which agents want to convert to the new worldview, seek reasons to convert, and/or put themselves in circumstances they hope will lead to conversion—are clear examples of the directional influence of desire leading to conversion.

Not all conversions are indoctrinating or voluntaristic, though. C. S. Lewis begins his book *The Problem of Pain* ([1940] 2015) by informing his readers that if anyone had asked him while he was an atheist why he did not believe in God, he would have responded by articulating a version of the problem of evil. He then dedicates the rest of this book to offering a philosophical response to the problem, and hence to explaining why he changed his mind. If this development reflects the nature of Lewis's conversion, then one can reasonably claim he underwent a reflective conversion. A reflective

conversion occurs when an agent converts after surveying a wide range of considerations, both for and against the new worldview, weighing up those considerations or reasoning in some other rationally acceptable way to the conclusion that the new worldview is true. Conversion to the new worldview may result from realizing upon reflection that adherence to the current worldview cannot be rationally sustained, or from discovering some positive reason that favors the new worldview. Other forms of conversion often involve reflection. But in a genuinely reflective conversion, the agent is as free as anyone to manage their beliefs (unlike indoctrinating conversion), and the agent's inquiry is not biased in favor of the new worldview (unlike indoctrinating and voluntaristic conversion). Because there is no reason to think reflective conversion necessarily involves indoctrination or motivated reasoning, reflective converts can point to their conversions to rebut indoctrination-based and motivating reasoning-based explanatory challenges.

The final account identifies unreliable belief formation as the unrespectable genealogy highlighted by explanatory challenges. For instance, Vavova (2018: 142) writes, 'the worry about irrelevant influences is that your actual beliefs may not be reliably formed'. Beliefs can be unreliably formed in many ways. Indoctrination and motivated reasoning are, presumably, two such ways. There are certainly others, but we need not get bogged down in details. Presumably, reflective conversion involves reliable means of belief formation. If a reflective convert properly uses deduction, induction, abduction, and so on—without affective or other distortions—there is no reason to think her beliefs are unreliably formed. Moreover, nothing hangs on these particular methods of belief formation. Unless you are a skeptic, you will think that *some* methods of belief formation are reliable. So, unless you think *no* reliable methods can lead to conversion—and why think this?—you will acknowledge conversion can result from reliable methods of belief formation. Hence, you should think that some converts can cite their conversion to rebut unreliable belief formation explanatory challenges. I refer to this character as a 'reflective convert'. If you think that reflection is irrelevant, keep your 'reliable' convert in mind when I refer to the reflective convert. We should all agree that reflective converts can reasonably cite their conversions to rebut charges of unreliable belief formation.

Where does this leave us? It is implausible to claim every convert can cite their conversion to rebut every explanatory challenge. On the other hand, it is quite plausible that reflective converts *can* cite their conversion to rebut every explanatory challenge *if* all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges. It is tempting, then, to accept the following argument in favor of a limited conversion defense:

Argument from Genealogy

G1.   All explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges.

G2.   If all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges, then if a convert's conversion does not involve an unrespectable genealogy, then she can cite her conversion to rebut any explanatory challenge.

G3. Therefore, if a convert's conversion does not involve an unrespectable genealogy, then she can cite her conversion to rebut any explanatory challenge.

G4. Reflective conversion does not involve an unrespectable genealogy.

G5. Therefore, reflective converts can cite their reflective conversion to rebut any explanatory challenge.

Nevertheless, we should resist this temptation because this argument is unsound, or so I argue. I grant G2 and G4. In the next section, I argue against G1 by providing an alternative account of explanatory challenges. Given this alternative account, I argue in section 4 that G5 is also false.

3. Not All Explanatory Challenges Are Genealogical Challenges

Why is G1 false? Why are not all explanatory challenges genealogical challenges? Because a significant class of explanatory challenges criticize target beliefs by explaining them not in terms of an unrespectable genealogy, but in terms of *current closed-mindedness*. If this is correct, then not all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges, because current closed-mindedness is not a genealogical feature of belief. My main argument for this account relies on facts about the dynamics associated with issuing explanatory challenges (§3.1). I bolster this account by showing how it captures what is correct in the motivated reasoning and indoctrination accounts (§3.2). Finally, I argue that cases which have recently been argued to raise vice-free genealogical concerns do not undermine and may actually further support the closed-mindedness account (§3.3).

3.1 Explanatory Challenge Dynamics and Closed-Mindedness

Begin by observing that explanatory challenges typically are not an opening move, but a last resort. We are inclined to issue them only after more direct undermining efforts have been exhausted. When our interlocutors remain unmoved after we have presented our strongest counterevidence and our best counterarguments, *then* we are inclined to exclaim, 'Don't you realize you just believe that because you were raised that way?!' This suggests what prompts us to level these challenges is our perception that our interlocutor is responding inappropriately or being altogether unresponsive to counterconsiderations. Thus, part of the concern is that the person's beliefs are overly resilient. As a person's belief becomes more resilient, it becomes harder for counterevidence to reduce her confidence in that belief. A person's belief is *overly* resilient when it is inappropriately insensitive to undermining considerations. Overly resilient belief is often a manifestation of closed-mindedness. Thus, I submit that *current closed-mindedness* is the defect explanatory challenges are often meant to highlight. If explanatory challenges were always genealogical challenges, it is unclear why these challenges would have these dynamics. Why would we not just begin the conversation by probing the

genealogy of the person's beliefs? Why wait? The hypothesis that explanatory challenges are sometimes concerned not with genealogy, but with current closed-mindedness better explains these dynamics.

What is closed-mindedness? Heather Battaly (2018) has developed a plausible analysis. Closed-mindedness is an unwillingness or inability to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options. Intellectual options include beliefs, ideas, evidence, the sources one consults, which methods of inquiry one uses, and which questions one asks. A closed-minded person might engage only superficially with relevant options, 'engage' with them by flatly dismissing them, or fail to engage by ignoring or failing to seek out these options. One might think these challenges are about dogmatism not closed-mindedness. But on Battaly's view, dogmatism is a type of closed-mindedness. Whereas you can be closed-minded about an issue on which you take no stance, dogmatism is an unwillingness to engage seriously with relevant alternatives to views you already hold.

Closed-mindedness is typically thought of as an intellectual vice. I emphasize that nothing in my argument requires this thought to be *correct*. Recall, explanatory challenges have two parts: (1) the explanation of why the person holds the target beliefs; and (2) the claim that accurately explaining beliefs in this way renders them problematic. I am attempting to characterize the nature of the explanation without weighing in on *whether* accurately explaining beliefs in that way renders them problematic. Recall I am setting aside concerns related to the claim that accurately explaining beliefs in this way renders them problematic because the conversion defense is a response to the claim that the belief should be explained as the challenge alleges. Now, if closed-mindedness were not typically *considered* a vice, it would be odd for someone to *challenge* a belief by explaining it in terms of closed-mindedness. But it is enough for my purposes to claim the explanation is often meant to be cashed out in terms of closed-mindedness and that it is typically thought that explaining a belief via closed-mindedness renders it problematic.

Is it odd, though, to say a belief can be explained in terms of closed-mindedness? I do not think so. Intellectual vices are cognitive dispositions invoked to provide critical, nonrationalizing explanations of people's beliefs and intellectual behavior (Cassam 2016: 164). If I ask you why you believe what you do, you will cite considerations you take to favor your position. This is a rationalizing explanation: it explains why you hold your belief by citing your reasons for accepting it as true. In contrast, I might say you believe what you do because you are gullible. This is a dispositional explanation: you believe something because you have a certain disposition. These two explanations are related: the reasons you give to support your belief might only strike you as reasons *because* you have the relevant disposition (Cassam 106: 163). Given that closed-mindedness is typically considered an intellectual vice, there is nothing odd about appealing to it to explain a person's belief.

This is my proposal. When critics level explanatory challenges, often they are implicitly issuing a dispositional explanation of why you believe what you do in terms of closed-mindedness, dogmatism, and related (alleged) intellectual vices. We say, 'you just believe P because you were raised in a community of P-believers!' when we think you manifest an unwillingness or inability to seriously

engage with relevant intellectual options. Maybe we think you refuse to consider that P might be false, or to accept the authority of certain sources that tell against P or the probative value of some evidence against P. In short, we often level these accusations when we think you continue to believe what you do because you are closed-minded about this issue.

One might reasonably and critically ask why standard explanatory challenges cite genealogy if they are not genealogical challenges. My response has three parts. First, although *some* explanatory challenges certainly do cite genealogy, not all do. People often say things like 'you just believe that because you're a liberal!' or 'because you're a Christian'. These look like explanatory challenges that do not cite genealogy. Second, I think when genealogy or other allegedly irrelevant factors are cited in these circumstances this is usually an attempt to describe the source of closed-mindedness. These two explanations are related: you just believe that because you are closed-minded and you are closed-minded because of your upbringing, because you want it to be true, because you are a liberal, and so on. Third, there is nothing fishy—or at least *distinctively* fishy—about the fact that my account requires a reinterpretation of the surface level content of explanatory challenges. Even proponents of genealogical accounts readily acknowledge the obscure nature of these challenges. For example, consider the following remark by Avnur and Scott-Kakures (2015), who defend the motivated reasoning account of explanatory challenges: 'while [explanatory challenges that say nothing about motivated reasoning] do not wear the implicated desire on their sleeves, we will argue that they are charitably and plausibly interpreted as implicating desire in the etiology of such beliefs' (9). Together, I think, these three considerations provide good reason not to worry about this objection.

That concludes my first argument against G1. G1 says all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges. I have argued this is false because explanatory challenges often explain target beliefs via closed-mindedness, rather than unrespectable genealogy. The closed-mindedness account explains the dynamics of a significant class of explanatory challenges better than G1 does.

3.2 Bolstering the Closed-Mindedness Account

I now bolster this closed-mindedness account by showing that it explains why indoctrination-based and motivated reasoning-based explanatory challenges can be appropriate even when the genealogy of a person's belief is respectable. The arguments proceed as follows: I describe a pair of cases involving motivated reasoning, and I claim that leveling an explanatory challenge is appropriate in both cases. The first case stipulates that motivated reasoning is present in the genealogy; the second stipulates the genealogy is respectable. If it is true that the explanatory challenge is appropriate in both cases, it follows that not all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges, since the genealogy in the second case is respectable by stipulation. Moreover, the closed-mindedness account can explain why the explanatory challenge is appropriate in both cases. Finally, I briefly describe a pair of cases involving indoctrination to make the same points about indoctrination. The fact that the closed-mindedness account captures

what is correct in the motivated-reasoning and indoctrination-based accounts provides it with further support.

Consider a case of self-deception that Avnur and Scott-Kakures (2015) use to defend their claim that explanatory challenges concern desire-based distortion. Al wants Blair to be interested in dating him, but he has strong evidence that she is not interested (she is already dating someone else, she has told him she just wants to be friends, or the like). But because he wants it to be true that Blair is interested, Al convinces himself she is interested by disregarding this evidence. Now imagine Al sharing his new belief with his friend Cat. After hearing Al's reasoning, Cat says, 'You just believe that because you want it to be true!' Cat then identifies all the evidence Al is disregarding.

The fact that the explanatory challenge looks appropriate here might suggest genealogy is the culprit: the origin of Al's belief is motivated reasoning. But a very similar case can be concocted where the origin of Al's belief is perfectly respectable, and yet a motivated reasoning-based explanatory challenge is still appropriate. Suppose Al originally believes Blair is interested because he starts off with good evidence that this is true (she emailed him asking him out), but he refuses to revise his belief when he receives new evidence against the belief he wants to be true (she sends another email saying the first email was not meant for him). Al relays his reasoning to Cat, and again she levels the explanatory challenge. In this case, the origins of Al's belief are respectable, yet the explanatory challenge would be appropriate. If this is correct, then not all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges. Moreover, the closed-mindedness position can account for both cases. What seems problematic is how Al sustains his belief: he is being closed-minded. This is why motivated reasoning, and other similar distortions, seem problematic. They are manifestations of an unwillingness or inability to engage seriously with relevant intellectual options.

Avnur and Scott-Kakures were onto something when they analyzed explanatory challenges in terms of desire's directional influence. Closed-mindedness, when it is an unwillingness, is in this vicinity. But recall they characterize the problematic desires as going 'beyond mere interest in believing the truth' (2015: 12). This differs from my account, and it is not sufficiently general. I assume the 'mere interest in believing the truth' includes both desire to *believe truth* and desire to *avoid error*. However, the unwillingness that constitutes an agent's allegedly objectionable closed-mindedness need not be based in desires for anything other than the truth and the absence of error. These desires can themselves close an agent's mind if she is confident she's already satisfied them. She might avoid reading certain materials, consuming certain news sources, entertaining certain thoughts, or living in certain areas precisely because she thinks these sources will corrupt her perspective and mislead her away from the truth she is acquired. In this case, we cannot complain that this person's inquiry is based in interests unrelated to believing truth and avoiding error. Rather, the complaint is that these interests have closed her mind.

One might question this line of thought as follows. On the one hand, an open-minded person need not consider all options at all times. If they did, they would never settle on any belief. Surely, open-mindedness does not demand universal suspension of judgment. So, ignoring some options doesn't entail

closed-mindedness. On the other hand, the person who *claims* to desire the truth while *also* ignoring a wide array of options to avoid corrupting her perspective is simply engaged in rationalization. So, either way, the sort of example under consideration does not show that one can be closed-minded because one desires the truth.

Much of this seems correct. I agree open-mindedness is consistent with not considering all options at all times and that ignoring some options at some times does not entail closed-mindedness. I am willing to grant open-mindedness does not demand universal suspension of judgment. I also think it is probably true that in many cases a person who behaves in these ways ostensibly in the name of truth is engaged in rationalization. But my reasoning was not meant to show that *every* person who claims to ignore relevant options for the sake of truth is truly doing so. The point is that the desires for truth and absence of error *can* close an agent's mind. If that's right and if it is true that explanatory challenges are often about closed-mindedness, then the concern raised by explanatory challenges is not limited to desires that go beyond a mere interest in believing the truth. Now, a related objection might suggest that *when* the desires for truth and the absence of error close a person's mind, there is nothing vicious, irrational, or otherwise epistemically problematic about this. Again, my project here does not require taking a stand on the conditions under which closed-mindedness is epistemically problematic. That being said, this claim strikes me as implausible. Concluding any and all counterconsiderations are misleading by holding fixed your current beliefs because you believe you've got the truth looks like paradigmatic epistemically criticizable behavior, even if it is done in the name of truth. Being guided only by the desires for truth and the absence of error does not provide sufficient grounds for rebutting explanatory challenges.

I have argued the closed-mindedness account can explain why motivated reasoning warrants an explanatory challenge both in cases where motivated reasoning appears in the genealogy and in cases where it does not. The closed-mindedness account has the same explanatory advantage regarding indoctrination. Because the reasoning here parallels the reasoning regarding motivated-reasoning, this discussion is brief.

According to Callan and Arena (2009), indoctrination need not involve problematic methods, intentions, or dogma. Rather, they argue convincingly that indoctrination characteristically instills closed-mindedness. If that is right, then a concern about closed-mindedness underlies indoctrination-based explanatory challenges. You might be born into a cult that indoctrinates its children into believing P. Later, I might appropriately confront you with an indoctrination-based explanatory challenge. Alternatively, you might begin by open-mindedly believing P on the basis of strong evidence, only to later join a cult that indoctrinates its members into believing P, i.e., closes its members' minds about P. Later, we might cross paths and I might provide you with excellent counterevidence, evidence you yourself would have accepted as sufficient reason to revise your opinion before joining the cult. After you remain unmoved, I might then appropriately level an indoctrination-based explanatory challenge against your belief. In this case, the origins of your belief were respectable. But the charge is appropriate all the same. Why? Only the former case involved an unrespectable genealogy, so genealogy cannot be the whole story. The closed-mindedness

account provides the same explanation for both cases: both involved indoctrination; hence, both involved closed-mindedness.

This subsection has provided additional support for the closed-mindedness account. This account captures what is correct in the motivated reasoning and indoctrination accounts.

3.3 Vice-Free Challenges?

While analyzing prejudice and echo chambers, philosophers have recently identified pernicious epistemic effects certain social arrangements can have on a person's cognitive development. However, these philosophers also argue that what looks like intellectually vicious behavior in these circumstances might instead be perfectly rational and vice-free byproducts of the person's upbringing (Begby 2013; Nguyen 2018). Does this spell trouble for my arguments?

It does not. The two relevant interpretations of these findings are both consistent with my arguments. On one interpretation, these philosophers have identified genealogical worries unrelated to closed-mindedness. But I have only argued some explanatory challenges are closed-mindedness challenges. This does not imply that there are no genealogical worries. On another interpretation, they have shown the impotency of some explanatory challenges by showing that believing things because of your upbringing can be perfectly rational and vice-free. But I am remaining neutral on which belief explanations render those beliefs problematic. Thus, either way I think my arguments emerge unscathed.

Dialectically, these brief comments would suffice to answer this concern. But I want to go a step further. I am not convinced that these cases are vice-free. A full defense of this thought must wait for another occasion. Still, I briefly defend it here because I think that not only do these cases fail to undermine the closed-mindedness account, they may actually provide it with additional support.

Endre Begby's discussion concerns Solomon, a character taught in youth that women are less intelligent than men (Arpaly 2003). This claim receives confirmation from the distribution of intelligence among men and women in Solomon's isolated community. According to Begby, Solomon's belief is perfectly rational given his evidence. But suppose Solomon goes off to university and fails to revise his belief after encountering many intelligent women. We might think Solomon's belief is irrational now, and perhaps indicative of intellectual vice (Arpaly 2003; Fricker 2007). But Begby argues that Solomon's continued commitment to his prejudice does not indicate vice. Why not? First, Solomon's belief should be analyzed as a generic judgment rather than a universally quantified statement. So, counter-stereotypical instances don't disprove it. Moreover, Solomon encounters these women exactly where he would expect to find intelligent women: at university. Far from undermining it, then, observing intelligent women at university is what Solomon's prejudice predicts.

C. Thi Nguyen argues that when a person's upbringing inculcates certain patterns of trust and distrust, this can make it rational and virtuous for her to engage in behavior that merely *seems* intellectually vicious. Doubting climate science, distrusting the mainstream media, and believing Hillary Clinton is running a child

sex ring in a pizza parlor need not involve any intellectual vice if you have been taught to trust and distrust certain sources of information. We all rely on others to tell us whom and what information to trust. Once we distribute our trust accordingly, not only can it be very difficult to upset this distribution, maintaining it come what may can also be intellectually virtuous depending on the distribution.

What should we make of all this? Begby and Nguyen have identified interesting—and troubling—consequences of our informational dependence on others. We do rely on others in the ways they describe. What happens next may be a matter of bad epistemic luck. But I am not convinced these cases are vice-free. We know we and the people on whom we rely for information are fallible. This places rational demands on us that, to my mind, Begby's and Nguyen's characters fail to meet.

Some factors that might demand less confidence and more openness to revision in light of counterconsiderations that are not taken into account by their characters include the limited nature of their information and experiences; the complexity of the relevant issues (surrounding intelligence, politics, religion, morality, and trust); the mixed and murky nature of evidence concerning these issues; the possibility of alternative, undiscovered or unconsidered explanations of their evidence; the motives of testifiers; facts about the social dynamics in which they are embedded, like group polarization and echo chambers; possible distortions produced by the order in which information is received; and facts about disagreement. These characters do not appear to take any of this into account when managing their beliefs.

I am not claiming it is *impossible* to imagine cases where these considerations are beyond the ken of the relevant characters. But Begby's and Nguyen's discussions are interesting precisely because their cases are meant to be pedestrian. And in *ordinary* cases many of these considerations are available to the relevant agents. Not taking them into account strikes me as a failure of intellectual humility closely tied to closed-mindedness. We do depend on others for information. Knowing we are all fallible means we need to compensate for the ways in which this dependence can lead us astray. This sets high standards for avoiding intellectual vice. I think that is the correct result. It also might set different standards from traditional Evidentialist or Bayesian standards of perfect rationality and intellectual virtue and vice. I have argued elsewhere this, too, is correct (DiPaolo 2019).

Nomy Arpaly (2003) and Miranda Fricker (2007) judge Solomon's behavior intellectually vicious. Moreover, it would seem quite natural to level an explanatory challenge against Solomon after attempting to convince him he is wrong about women's relative intelligence. A correlation between these facts is predicted by the closed-mindedness account. Even if Begby's and Nguyen's discussions raise genealogical concerns, it is reasonable to think they also raise vice-related explanatory challenge concerns. Contrary to what these philosophers argue, the cases they describe arguably do involve vice.

3.4 Summary

I have argued not all explanatory challenges are genealogical challenges. The closed-mindedness account, a non-genealogical account, better captures the

dynamics of explanatory challenges, and it explains why apparently genealogical concerns—motivated reasoning and indoctrination—can prompt explanatory challenges even when genealogies are respectable. Finally, recent discussions concerning allegedly vice-free byproducts of upbringing do not undermine the closed-mindedness account. Thus, the closed-mindedness account should be judged a serious contender.

4. Reflective Conversion and Closed-Mindedness

To return to my main question: if a reflective convert receives an explanatory challenge against her belief in her new worldview, can she cite her conversion to rebut this challenge? The Argument from Genealogy outlined above was meant to provide an affirmative answer. I have argued G1 is false. Might the conclusion still be true?

If the argument is unsound for the reasons I have presented, then we should also think the conclusion is false. If explanatory challenges are often not genealogical challenges but closed-mindedness explanations of belief, then there is reason to think reflective converts cannot cite their conversion to rebut these challenges. Again, I am assuming the reflective convert's genealogy of their new worldview is respectable, and I'm not going to consider whether closed-mindedness is problematic. Instead, I argue that even the most epistemically respectable kind of conversion, including reflective conversion, can lead to closed-mindedness. The fact that a convert's acceptance of a worldview is not born of closed-mindedness neither guarantees nor counts as strong evidence that she isn't closed-minded now, for at least two reasons. First, the reflective convert's new worldview might encourage closed-mindedness (section 4.1). Second, undergoing an open-minded conversion might *increase* the convert's risk of behaving closed-mindedly after her conversion (4.2). Thus, if explanatory challenges concern current closed-mindedness and if a reflective convert cites her conversion to answer these challenges, we should refuse to accept this defense as probative or, at least, be quite cautious about doing so.

4.1 A Convert's New Worldview Might Encourage Closed-Mindedness

Some worldviews encourage closed-mindedness. If the convert's reflective conversion has led her to commit fully to a worldview that encourages closed-mindedness about the domain of that worldview, then her reflective conversion has led her to closed-mindedness and cannot be cited to rebut explanatory challenges.

Interestingly, C. S. Lewis may be someone whose conversion involved open-mindedness yet also caused him to adopt a worldview that encourages closed-mindedness. Lewis was raised Christian, became an atheist, and eventually returned to Christianity. Consider how his new worldview influenced his interpretation of his early intellectual development. In retrospect, Lewis claimed his youthful renunciation of Christianity was initiated by discussions about the occult with a matron at school, but he ultimately blamed someone else for toppling his worldview: 'the Enemy did this in me, taking occasion from things she innocently

said. One reason why the Enemy found this so easy was that, without knowing it, I was already desperately anxious to get rid of my religion' ([1955] 2012: 60).

The 'Enemy' refers to Satan. As Lewis considers these events after returning to Christianity, he thinks Satan took advantage of the doubt and anxiety he felt while the matron opened his eyes to a new worldview. I would wager that a person is unwilling to engage seriously with atheism while he believes doubt about God's existence results from Satan's cognitive meddling. By this person's lights, such questioning amounts to surrendering his mind over to Satan.

Moreover, Lewis endorsed a sort of 'Satanic skepticism': 'The more a man was in the Devil's power, the less he would be aware of it' ([1970] 1994: 40). It seems to me this belief, when it is operative, would lead to closed-mindedness about God's existence. If you start taking seriously God's nonexistence, you will either notice Satan's influence on your thoughts or you will not. If you do, you will probably avoid this line of thinking. If you do not, you will probably think this is one of those times you're in his power without being aware of it. Either way, it seems you would stop taking seriously God's nonexistence while you maintain this belief about Satan's role in your cognition.

To be clear, not every Christian is committed to this worldview, so not every Christian convert will be susceptible to this concern. And plenty of non-Christian worldviews encourage closed-mindedness. Nevertheless, because this sort of case is possible, it follows that conversions characterized by open-mindedness can lead converts to adopt worldviews that encourage closed-mindedness. So, although reflective conversion may be evidence against a convert's having been closed-minded, the status of a convert's epistemic vice after her conversion depends on her new worldview, and how fully she commits herself to it. This means citing an open-minded conversion does not on its own rebut explanatory challenges.

4.2 Virtuous Conversions Can Lead to Vicious Intellectual Behavior

What if the convert's new worldview does not encourage closed-mindedness? Can an open-minded reflective conversion into an open-minded worldview be cited to rebut the claim that she believes her new worldview because she is closed-minded?

I do not want to deny that such conversions provide some evidence against current closed-mindedness. Previous virtue can be evidence against current vice. Moreover, it is natural to expect reflection on one's own conversion to increase open-mindedness: 'I was seriously mistaken before. Maybe I am mistaken now. I had better keep an open mind!' Still, converts often strike people as being overly dogmatic: think of the proverbial zeal of the convert. In this section, I describe a mechanism that explains why an intellectually virtuous conversion might make the convert less virtuous. Precisely because the reflective convert can reasonably think she has evidence of her own open-mindedness she is at greater risk of 'epistemic self-licensing' akin to 'moral self-licensing'. If conversion increases the chances of epistemic self-licensing, conversion may therefore increase the chances of the convert's being closed-minded. Thus, conversion may not be strong evidence against current closed-mindedness.

What is self-licensing? As Anna Merritt, Daniel Effron, and Benoît Monin explain, 'When people are confident their past behavior demonstrates compassion, generosity, or a lack of prejudice, they are more likely to act in morally dubious ways without fear of feeling heartless, selfish, or bigoted' (2010: 344). In slogan form: virtuous behavior frees people to act less-than-virtuously. Studies suggest an opportunity to choose environmentally friendly products can increase subsequent dishonesty, agreeing to provide help can reduce people's charitable donations, and endorsing a black politician can increase willingness to favor whites over blacks in certain decisions (Effron and Conway 2015). There is a fair amount of evidence that this phenomenon exists (Monin and Miller 2001; Merritt, Effron, and Monin 2010; Miller and Effron 2010; Effron and Conway 2015), and in a review, Effron and Paul Conway (2015: 32) describe moral self-licensing effects as 'reliable, if modestly sized' and note that although evidence for this phenomenon comes primarily from laboratory studies, recent field studies suggest generalizability to real-world contexts.

How does self-licensing work? It can work by credits ('I behaved generously before, so I've earned some selfish behavior now'.) or credentials ('I behaved generously before, hence I am not selfish, hence I am not being selfish now'.). Regarding the latter, the idea is not that one sees one's previous apparently good deeds as *entitling* transgression, but rather the apparently good deeds clarify that the subsequent behavior is not actually a transgression. Credentials serve as a lens through which one interprets and disambiguates behavior in line with those credentials (Monin and Miller 2001: 349). This 'reasoning' need not be conscious, though there is no evidence that it cannot be. A prominent thought among psychologists about the mechanism underlying moral self-licensing is that the chance to establish your moral credentials to yourself or others reduces your inhibition against behavior that could cast doubt on your morality (Effron and Conway 2015).

What is *epistemic* self-licensing? It is not obvious what credit-based epistemic self-licensing would be, but credential-based epistemic self-licensing would work by analogy with its moral counterpart: when you believe you possess certain epistemic credentials, you are more likely than you otherwise would have been to engage in epistemic conduct that could cast doubt on your epistemic credentials. When you think you have certain epistemic credentials, you do not worry too much about behavior that might cast doubt on those credentials. Epistemic self-licensing occurs when possessing evidence of certain alleged credentials leads to less or weaker vigilance, giving certain behaviors a 'pass' when they are challenged. Again, ambiguous or questionable behavior, perhaps behavior that is *being* questioned, gets interpreted in ways that cohere with the alleged credentials.

To date, there is no empirical literature on epistemic self-licensing. But there is reason to think it is a genuine phenomenon. First, moral self-licensing is a type of psychological licensing: fear of discredit inhibits certain behaviors, and the source of the license removes that inhibition (Effron 2016). In moral self-licensing the fear derives from a concern about appearing less-than-virtuous, and the source of license is evidence of moral virtue. Although psychologists working on this issue have only studied *moral* virtue, if evidence of virtue grants license, it is reasonable

to expect these effects to carry over to epistemic virtue. If you care about being open-minded but do not yet have reason to consider yourself open-minded, fear of appearing closed-minded to others or yourself might make you less likely to behave closed-mindedly. Acquiring evidence against your closed-mindedness, though, might remove that fear and make you less vigilant, and therefore more likely to engage in closed-minded behavior than you would have been without this evidence.

Second, it is not difficult to identify plausible examples of epistemic self-licensing. Consider people who are absolutely confident of their unpopular views. Candidates include Flat-Earthers, conspiracy theorists, Westboro Baptist Church members, and the New Atheists. Clinging to a minority opinion in light of widespread, serious, and thoughtful intellectual opposition is, arguably, an epistemically questionable behavior. How do these people do it? Insisting they simply do not care about truth is implausible, partly because they often profess a deep regard for the truth. Instead, these people, who hold otherwise disparate views, justify their intellectual behavior by telling remarkably similar stories appealing to their own alleged epistemic virtue and others' alleged epistemic vice. The fact that their beliefs are unpopular makes them nonconforming, independent thinkers. Their beliefs are unpopular because they reflect 'hard truths'. Their willingness to believe these truths rather than comforting falsehoods is evidence of their own intellectual honesty, and evidence against their own motivated reasoning and self-deception. Others' unwillingness is evidence of the opposite. For instance, compare the contrasting descriptions of in-groups and out-groups by Richard Dawkins (New Atheist) and Megan Phelps-Roper (former Westboro Baptist Church member). Dawkins (2006: 3) famously labels religious belief 'delusional' while claiming atheism typically indicates a 'healthy independence of mind'. Similarly, according to Phelps-Roper, Westboro members—who maintain notoriously hateful and discriminatory interpretations of the Bible—see other Christians as giving into self-deception and motivated reasoning, while Westboro members are the intellectually honest ones committed to truth (Harris 2015). Of course, what intellectual honesty and independence look like differs among these people: sometimes it is following reason and science, sometimes literal readings of religious texts. But these stories are structurally similar: confidence in one's own relative epistemic virtue grants license to persist in one's unpopular beliefs. In other words, belief in their own virtue leads to questionable epistemic conduct by removing the fear of discredit. This looks like epistemic self-licensing.

Empirical investigation is needed to determine the prevalence and extent of epistemic self-licensing. I would recommend looking at conversion. When converts take their conversion to evince their intellectual virtue, they may be more likely to behave viciously. There are several ways this might occur.

First, when a convert is not subject to standard *genealogical* explanatory challenges, this may itself be a source of self-licensing. Even if explanatory challenges do not always concern genealogy, genealogical anxiety is a genuine phenomenon: people often worry about potentially unrespectable origins of their beliefs. Genealogical anxiety is salutary when it inhibits certain vicious intellectual behaviors. When the convert's worldview does not directly reflect her upbringing,

she may not suffer from genealogical anxiety. Lacking inhibitions grounded in this anxiety may lead to viciousness.

Second, the reflective convert's path often involves overcoming confirmation bias and motivated reasoning. She might think this indicates her positive epistemic credentials: she is less subject to these distorting forces than others. In turn, greater confidence in her lower susceptibility to these forces may correlate with less vigilance, which may end up increasing her susceptibility. All the while, she may remain confident in her credentials.

Third, the effects may be more direct. She may think her conversion indicates her open-mindedness, which may lead her to behave closed-mindedly without fear of appearing closed-minded. When others challenge her credentials by insisting she is being closed-minded, she may persist in closed-minded behavior. Others who have not undergone a reflective conversion and who lack any special indication of their own open-mindedness might worry in this circumstance that their behavior is closed-minded, which might help prevent or reduce closed-mindedness. But this reflective convert may not worry because she thinks she already knows she is open-minded.

These are three ways converts might succumb to self-licensing. Obviously, not all converts will fall into these traps. The open-mindedness that characterized their conversions may persist. Also, as the unpopular belief example suggests, converts aren't alone in being susceptible to self-licensing. So what is the connection between conversion, explanatory challenges, and self-licensing?

The question I am addressing in this section is whether reflective converts can cite their conversion to rebut charges of closed-mindedness. So far, I have said it depends on whether their new worldview encourages closed-mindedness. No matter how open-minded your conversion was, if you fully commit and conform to a worldview that encourages closed-mindedness, you will likely be closed-minded. Citing your conversion does not rebut the accusation.

Now I am identifying a less obvious way conversion can lead to closed-mindedness, and I am explaining why conversion should not be accepted as a satisfying rebuttal to closed-mindedness explanatory challenges. Empirical evidence suggests that morally virtuous behavior can lead to morally vicious behavior. I am suggesting the same probably goes for epistemically virtuous behavior. It may even underlie the suspicion concerning the zeal of the convert. Recognizing the credentials their open-minded conversion earned them, reflective converts may self-license to closed-minded behavior in two ways pertaining to explanatory challenges.

First, if converts appeal to their conversion to self-license *prior* to receiving an explanatory challenge, then their conversion is partly responsible for their current closed-mindedness. It is for this reason that it is implausible to think conversion can be cited as evidence against closed-mindedness when responding to an explanatory challenge. It is not just that an open-minded conversion is *consistent* with the possibility that the convert is now being closed-minded. Rather, recognition of the phenomenon of epistemic self-licensing gives us reason to think an open-minded conversion *makes more likely* current closed-mindedness. In light

of the phenomenon of epistemic self-licensing, an open-minded conversion might provide reason to think the convert *warrants* the explanatory challenge.

There is a second connection between self-licensing and explanatory challenges. We should be wary of accepting conversion as evidence against closed-mindedness in the context of explanatory challenges because this seems like exactly the context in which credential-based self-licensing is likely to occur. Explanatory challenges question a person's epistemic credentials. Responsibly responding to these challenges requires inquiring into those credentials. The reflective convert might be satisfied relying on the credentials her conversion earned her to disambiguate her resistance to counterevidence, interpreting it as cohering with her previous open-mindedness. But this dodges the challenge, for the challenge alleges current, not *previous* closed-mindedness. Even if a convert had not been self-licensing prior to receiving an explanatory challenge, she might self-license in *answering* that challenge.

Thus, we should be wary of accepting the reflective convert's appeal to her conversion to rebut explanatory challenges. The fact that she underwent an open-minded conversion implies nothing about whether she is currently conforming to a worldview that encourages closed-mindedness, and it may provide reason to think she is more likely to engage in closed-minded behavior via self-licensing.

5. Conclusion

Before we rescind an explanatory challenge leveled in the midst of apparent intransigence when we discover our interlocutor's conversion, or before we dismiss such a challenge presented against our beliefs by appealing to our own conversions, we need to examine seriously not only belief origins but also current closed-mindedness. However, reflecting on one's epistemic credentials may, by one's own lights, grant license to persist in questionable conduct if that reflection uncovers evidence of epistemic virtue. Being freed from worldviews inherited in youth, as converts often are, can itself lead to closed-mindedness.

As noted above, my interest in converts is based in optimism that we can get clues on how to reduce divisions in belief by studying their intellectual transformations. But in order to ensure appropriate expectations I want to critically examine converts' epistemic credentials. From what I have argued here, I hope it is clear that we need to avoid idolizing converts. In particular, one potential credential—immunity to explanatory challenges—is not one that converts can claim.

JOSHUA DIPAOLO
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY FULLERTON
jdipaolo@fullerton.edu

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