What happens when an individual undergoes religious conversion? What stirs people to believe? And what is the role of rhetoric in conversion? Anyone who sets out to answer these questions will be challenged by the fact that 'results may vary' in relation to their chosen analytical context. Many of the world's quandaries can be straightforwardly resolved, and don't have the same inherent complexity as our topic, because their particular constructions automatically reveal the most expedient measures by which they can be gauged. For example, it is not hard to understand what is being asked when faced with the problem of whether or not a chinchilla is a lizard. Nor should there be much difficulty in figuring out *how* the question should be answered. One simply has to consult her copy of *A Lexicon of the Natural World.* But such is not the case with regards to issues of religious experience. There is no set point from which to begin.

And, disquietingly, our starting point is a crucial part of our investigation. It governs where we might potentially end up. The mystic, as William Paden reminds us, will interpret religious phenomena at variance with the behavioral psychologist. Likewise, the neuroscientist, the cultural critic, and the theologian will each arrive at unique conclusions, based on the parameters of inquiry that are built in to their respective disciplines, even though they are scrutinizing exactly the same events. And the list could quite easily be extended. "Conflict in interpreting religion," Paden writes, "is more a consequence of disparate perspectives than of disparate facts." (126) Hence, as far as the questions with which we are now occupied are concerned, whatever answers we "see" will tell us as much about our foundation as they will about what we are looking at.

Having said all that, let's begin! First off, for the reasons we've just elucidated, you are entitled to know what cards I am playing with as we enter into this discussion. So at the risk of spending too much time on the preliminaries, allow me to lay them out before you.

I grew up in a small farming community, where most everyone belonged, at least nominally, to one of the only three religious institutions in town. Two of these were Christian churches of the evangelical persuasion, one of which my mother (and later on my father) attended regularly, with my sister and me always in tow. The third church was also Christian, but more agnostic and liberal in both teaching and flavor. Before the outset of my adolescence, having been shipped off to bible camp one summer, I had what I understood at the time to be the experience of being born again. It was powerful and emotional. I felt cleansed and connected to God, inspired to live as a Christian should, and imbued with a sense of purpose and love.

Religion comprised a significant part of our family life, and our home was frequently host to the church's minister, Dick Williams. I was always inclined towards spiritual matters, and would often bombard "Pastor Dick" with questions on subjects ranging from angels to eternity to the nature of God. He was a very large, long-winded, intimidating man who had lived an excessively sinful and rough life before he converted and felt the call to ministry sometime (I think) around his thirties. During one of my bombardments, his tone suddenly became dark and brooding. He reminded me of the characters in *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World*, making reference to God's call on my life, and insinuating quite directly that I might someday have the option to pay for the truth in a fashion not unlike the martyrs had. I have no way of knowing whether or not this was a unique conversation between him and me, or a script that he employed to sober up all the boys in his congregation, but it is one that sticks with me to this day.

When I was about thirteen, we moved to the city in pursuit of a better life. There, apart from the rest of my family, I discovered a vibrant and charismatic, if at times unusual, denomination where

"the gifts of the Spirit" (glossolalia, for example) were both encouraged and practiced.   As a teenager, the magic of it attracted me, but probably not as much as the enthusiasm and passion for God that I felt there. I became rigorously involved in church life, and by the age of sixteen enrolled in the denomination's bible college, at the same time completing high school courses by way of correspondence. If it had not been for the vicissitudes of my life, I might have by now been beginning my own ministry. But that was not what happened. After the first semester of college, a growing tension between the church's worldview and dimensions of my own experience erupted; things came crashing down around me, and I left the faith.

In the six or seven years since, I would describe myself as having been, for the most part, a seeker. I am someone who wants to believe, but am quite guarded when it comes to putting my faith in something. The injured part of my psyche applies the breaks whenever I feel the inkling to align myself with an ideology or a symbolic order with even the slightest abandon. I've by now recreated my own value structure, which has at least the veneer of faith or spirituality, based on bits and pieces from an assortment of religions and wisdom teachings, but it is not one that I would defend with much ardor. Nevertheless, I maintain a strong curiosity toward religions, and have become particularly interested in their power to influence belief, attitudes, and behavior. It's possible that this fascination stems from the need to rationalize and demystify, and in so doing, disempower, the lost faith by which I am haunted, but I am more inclined to think simply that it is a testament to the strength of conversion rhetoric, and, perhaps, an indication of my spiritually sensitive constitution. In any case, the rhetoric of conversion to Christianity, which is the subject matter of this paper, can be generalized, and its broader applications with regards to the art and science of persuasion are far reaching. I invite you to form your own generalizations in this vein from the material that follows. [Addendum--Though still, in some ways, a seeker, and happy to call myself one, I'm these days also prepared to profess my faith in Christ, which has returned to me stronger than ever (although the form of that faith seems to transcend the boundaries that I put on it so many years ago). June, 2002]

When I set out to research this paper, I initially had in mind to explore rhetoric within the context of "cults," because that is where I expected to see the most extreme forms of commitment among converts. This was immediately problematic for several reasons. First, I found it difficult to leave the negative stigma associated with cults behind, and discuss them from an essentially amoral standpoint, purely in terms of what makes them so influential in the lives of certain individuals. Second, it became evident that the term "cult" is rather amorphous and difficult to nail down. One person's cult is another's religion. And finally, while there is much to be found within the literature on religious conversion in general, I encountered little relevant discussion on the subject of cults.

In turn, my focus expanded to include all kinds of conversion. Then, mainly as a result of the limitations of time, and to avoid conducting cursory analysis, it was narrowed again to deal specifically with Christianity. Early on in the research, I encountered a couple of sentences in Arthur Calder-Marshall's account of his own religious transformation that resonated with my personal experience, and which ultimately served to establish the terms for the rest of the investigation. He writes, "I dislike the word conversion…Two Greek words better describe the experience, *ekstasis* followed by *metanoia;* a standing outside oneself followed by a change of thinking." (33) I began to see the phenomenon in terms of two distinct processes, one involving the reformation of the identity or self-image, and another concerning changes in the belief system (though I viewed the particular temporal order that Calder-Marshall suggests as just one possible sequence of events). For the remainder of this analysis, I will make repeated mention of these processes, referring to the former as Emergence and the latter as Belief Formation.[i]

For our purposes, Belief Formation is related to the self, whereas Emergence is essentially the

enduing of the self with whatever the self is made of. In fact, it could be stated more succinctly: Emergence is the process through which the self is manifest. This phrasing might invoke demands for drawn out explanation – and rightly so, however I'm not sure I'm up to the task. So perhaps for the moment it would be more pellucid to state the obvious, to say that in one process beliefs are formed, and that in another the self emerges. Either way, this distinction reveals much.

Belief Formation can be understood in terms of choice; informed or ignorant, conscious or unconscious, free or conditioned, but choice nevertheless. It proceeds like this: The self, on whatever level of awareness, makes a decision with regard to the validity of a given proposition, and the outcome of that decision determines the nature and intensity of whichever beliefs are formed in conjunction to it. This doesn't apply nearly as straightforwardly with Emergence, however, which ultimately entails a verb like 'to be,' or 'to manifest being' rather than 'to believe.' It is not always clear whether the self acts or is acted upon – or for that matter, appears through some other means entirely – in this process, and consequently the apparatus of choice is ambiguous.

But don't beliefs drive Emergence? And doesn't the self, in effect, arise from the matrix of choices we make – including choices with regard to what we believe? Also good questions. And to the extent that they can be answered in the affirmative, they show us how the two elements of conversion come together. But we must also recognize that the relationship between them cannot be reduced to strict, unidirectional terms of cause and effect. In order to see this, one simply has to observe its reciprocity, which should be readily apparent by now, given our introduction to Belief Formation above. Golden, Berquist, and Coleman comment on these dynamics in terms of systems theory, reminding us that "since the self-concept and belief system represent a 'functionally interconnected *system*,' a change in any one part should necessitate changes in other components." (345) This will all require further attention as we continue to elaborate a conversion rhetoric. At present, however, we have said enough to turn to the stories of two well known converts: Augustine of Hippo and C. S. Lewis.

Early on in life, Augustine demonstrated exceptional talent for communication, and we can be assured that he would have been accordingly possessed of a corresponding sophistication in construing and understanding motives. To put it another way, dexterity with words involves advanced symbolicity, and if advanced symbolicity, then necessarily heightened ability to abstract and manage the significance of things. Consequently, a marked capacity – or propensity – to weave meaning out of events must have been manifest in Augustine's relationship with language. As I imagine it, this may have had something to do with the unhappiness of his youth as he recalls it in *The Confessions* (see, for example, 1.12 and 1.18), inasmuch as an unusually rigorous emphasis on the 'why' of the universe might obstruct simple enjoyments and leave one unsatisfied with anything but the most profoundly developed sense of congruity. All speculation aside, however, *The Confessions* indicate that Augustine's life was characterized (at least until his divine encounter in the garden) by inner unrest, beginning at a young age.

As a student at Carthage at the age of nineteen, he encountered Cicero's *Hortensius*, a work since vanished, in which the reader is encouraged to pursue philosophy. Its impact on his life was sweeping, and he writes that it "quite definitely changed my whole attitude and turned my prayers toward thee, O Lord, and gave me new hope and new desires." (3.4) His repeated references to this book throughout the *Confessions* make it clear that his encounter with it was no small matter in his own evaluation. In fact, some scholars assert that it would be well informed to think of it as the first in a series of conversions, "preparing the way for his eventual discovery of Christian wisdom." (Chadbourne, 35) Even as a teenager, however, he was not wholly taken by it on the grounds that Christ was absent from its pages; this being a sign that, for Augustine, (some)

Christian doctrine already represented an established interface between reality and experience, a medium that would continue to provide context for the development of his consciousness in the years to come. This can be attributed in part to his mother, Monica (a devoted Christian), who, according to Harold Coward, would have regularly chanted passages from scripture in his presence when he was a boy. (20)

While at Carthage, he also developed an interest in the religion of the Manicheans, who seemed at the time to offer the only explanation for the existence of evil he could accept. (3.7) Although he maintained reservations about many of their doctrines, he continued to hope that Faustus, a renowned Manichean teacher, would be able to demonstrate their veracity to his satisfaction. Disappointingly, this proved not to be the case. Although Faustus was a delightful orator, he was not sufficiently informed by the liberal arts to reply authoritatively to Augustine's questions. This, however, did not lead to Augustine's immediate rejection of Manichism, regardless of whatever weaknesses made it problematic for him to accept, because though he was not entirely convinced of its truth, he hadn't been shown decisive evidence against it and had discovered nothing that he felt proffered a superior ontology. (5.7)

From Carthage, he moved to Rome where he taught for a short while, and again to Milan. It was there that he encountered the bishop Ambrose, whose eloquence softened his defenses to Christianity, and whose educated explanations of the faith persuaded him that it "could be maintained without presumption." (5.14) This inspired him to investigate more rigorously whether "there was any possible way to prove the Manicheans guilty of falsehood," and ultimately to reject them on the grounds that "the majority of the philosophers held the more probable views." (5.14)

All through the *Confessions,* it is possible to see Augustine's dealings as a sort of interface between his desires and his experiences, where each desire leads him to seek out new experiences, and each experience, in turn, has an effect on his desires. His exposure to *Hortensius,* for example, leads him to desire a life of philosophy and truth, which in turn causes him to look into Manichism. What he finds in Manichism leaves him with questions that he wants answered, and he thus turns to Faustus, and so on. Of course, this kind of "give and take" is by no means exclusive to the life of Augustine, but it would be valuable for us to keep it in the back of our minds as we continue with his story. Later, we'll return to this concept.

Now where are we? After rejecting the Manichean teachings in Rome, Augustine finds his belief system in quite a state – a "wavering state of agitation," in fact. (6.1) He rejects the Mani, but isn't willing to replace them with the philosophers, whose disregard for Christ exclude them from his wholehearted adherence (remember his reservation about *Hortensius*). All of this is in part due to Ambrose, whose faith, which is more erudite than he'd suspected possible for a Christian, inspires him to take a second look at the Church. As a result, he makes the very significant step of becoming a catechumen, although he clearly continues searching intensely for a definitive answer, not yet having been won over to the faith.

Progressively through the sixth and seventh books of the *Confessions*, however, he does form a belief in Christianity. It is an agonizing journey for him, occurring simultaneously on a number of levels of experience, and one that I think would be a challenge for almost any reader to follow with clarity. Nevertheless, he sets off to develop a narrative of the changes:

> Still from this time forward I began to prefer the Catholic doctrine…After that, O Lord, little by little, with a gentle and most merciful hand, drawing and calming my heart, thou didst persuade me that…it was not the ones who believed thy books…but those who did not believe them who were to be blamed…Moreover, those men were not to be listened to who would say to me, "How do you know that those Scriptures were imparted to mankind by the Spirit of the one and most true God?" For this

> was the point most of all to be believed…
> This much I believed, sometimes more strongly than others…(6.5)

Of course, Augustine's conversion has traditionally been located in book eight, during the seemingly mystical moment in the garden when he surrenders to Christ. And, without a doubt, that moment represents the crux of his new selfhood, the central juncture through which he emerges as a Christian, identified at odds with the Augustine of the past in one key sense: that he has become a person who can say "I am a Christian."

To suggest, however, that his conversion is a self-contained event that took place sometime between the instant he heard the child's voice encouraging him to "pick it up, read it" and the moment he closed the scripture and looked up to tell Alypius what happened is nearly to exclude Belief Formation from the process altogether. For in Augustine's case, we know that, although he is "as yet…not humble enough to hold the humble Jesus," (7.18) he assents to the tenets of the faith long before he 'becomes a Christian':

> I still believed both that thou dost exist and that thy substance is immutable, and that thou dost care for and wilt judge all men, and that in Christ, thy Son our Lord, and the Holy Scriptures, which the authority of the Catholic Church pressed on me, thou hast planned the way of man's salvation to that life which is to come after this death. (7.7)

And by the first chapter of book eight, he proceeds to describe his state of mind thus:

> Of thy eternal life I was now certain, although I had seen it "through a glass darkly." And I had been relieved of all doubt that there is an incorruptible substance and that it is the source of every other substance. Nor did I any longer crave greater certainty about thee, but rather greater steadfastness in thee.

In fact, it could be argued that his actual beliefs just before that moment in the garden were precisely equivalent to his beliefs just after it, and that what really changed was the texture and condition of his involvement in those beliefs. In other words, like an astronaut who has known for a long time that there is dust on the moon, but during his first mission in space is able to step out of a lunar landing pod, reach down, pick the dust up, and feel it sift through his fingers and fall back to the ground, Augustine gained *experiential* knowledge of what he already believed. Christianity wasn't an external truth to him anymore. It became the very substance of his being.

Well fine then. Wouldn't it be better to exclude Belief Formation from our definition altogether, and to think of conversion strictly in terms of Emergence? I suppose that would be a possibility, contingent upon the particular interpretive frames or 'terministic screens,' through which one views religious experience. But, having a conversion *rhetoric* in mind, I suggest it will not work for our purposes, this being the case on several grounds. First of all, we've by now established an area of confluence between the two processes, and shown that to some extent the relationship between them is one of reciprocatory agency (i.e., each, to some degree, plays a role in shaping or producing the other). Consequently, to extract one element is, at very minimum, to leave the other suspended out of context. Second, even if it were possible to isolate Emergence completely, it is not easily apparent how the phenomenon could be understood in terms of a particular religious faith without at least some basic kind of belief structure through which it could be articulated. Finally, the rhetorical perspective itself disposes us to attend to the mechanisms of persuasion in their entirety, so that even if we are hell-bent on locating conversion at a specific moment in time, we would be negligent if we did not investigate the ancillary transactions within consciousness that may contribute to it.

C. S. Lewis is highly conscious of the importance of Belief Formation in his own conversion as he works it out in *Surprised by Joy*, chronicling his journey in terms of the principle noetic influences

upon it. As the story progresses, he traces each major cognitive development in his rebirth: first a shift from Realism to Absolute Idealism, then a realization that the Joy he longs for so intensely is in reference to an entity outside of himself, followed by an association of that entity with the Absolute, leading to its personification, and so on. He represents each of the occasions on which he comes to accept a preliminary tenet of Christianity as though it were a move within a game of chess that ends in his eventual capitulation.

But there are number of additional and equally intriguing events in Lewis' autobiography – ones that seem to have more to do with transubstantiation of the self than with dialectical progression towards a Christian worldview. These could arguably include all of the various occasions on which he records the "stab of Joy," in so far as "Joy makes nonsense of our common distinction between having and wanting," and "the form of the desired is in the desire." (158, 209) In other words, Joy as he defines it could be seen as a mechanism of craving through which the self becomes identified with whatever is craved. But in any case, several incidents within the story – some involving Joy more explicitly than others – do stand out as remarkable and unmistakable examples of Emergence, and require our attention at this point.

The first is as shrouded in mystery as any. It begins on a hypercolour October evening during which he encounters *Phantastes, a fairie Romance* by George MacDonald. His account of the experience leaves one with the exasperating impression that its full magnitude can at best only be hinted at with words. Its result, however, is to irretrievably alter the quality of his intercourse with the world around him. He explains:

> For now I perceived that while the air of the new region [in *Phantastes*] made all my erotic and magical perversions of Joy look like sordid trumpery, it had no such disenchanting power over the bread on the table or the coals in the grate…Up till now each visitation of Joy had left the common world momentarily a desert…But now I saw the bright shadow coming out of the book into the real world and resting there, transforming all common things and yet itself unchanged…That night my imagination was, in a sense, baptized…(170-171)

Another event involves Lewis' decision – and the word 'decision' is hardly adequate in these circumstances – to let down his guard or surrender, although it isn't readily apparent at this point to whom or what. He describes himself becoming "made aware" that he is "holding something at bay, or shutting something out," and his subsequent termination of that resistance:

> I chose to open, to unbuckle, to loosen the rein. I say, "I chose," yet it did not really seem possible to do the opposite. You could argue that I was not a free agent, but I am more inclined to think that this came nearer to being a free act than most I have ever done. Necessity may not be the opposite of freedom, and perhaps a man is most free when, instead of producing motives, he could only say, "I am what I do." Then came the repercussion on the imaginative level. I felt as if I were a snowman at long last beginning to melt. (211-212)

A short while later, nearing the apex of his spiritual pilgrimage, he yields to the "steady, unrelenting approach," of a God that previously he had "so earnestly desired not to meet." (215) In a state of despondence, he lowers himself to his knees and prays, forcing a painful and cathartic relinquishment of the security and comfort of the old worldview, letting go of the wish that no divine personality would interfere with his life. At this juncture, possibly all that remains in order to fully implement the conversion to Christianity is the instatement of the apposite belief structure: Incarnation, death, resurrection, atonement, and so forth. In any case, as he describes it, he gives in and admits that God is God. (215)

It is this episode, in effect, that leads to his willingness to openly reexamine religion. In fact, he immediately begins to attend church, and does so with regularity for a number of months before consolidating his newly acquired theism within the Christian paradigm, although he attributes surprisingly little importance to this enterprise, suggesting that it isn't a substantial factor in his

ensuing adoption of Christianity over, for example, Hinduism. Incidentally, his view in this regard is not the one that would most likely materialize from our present consideration of conversion (in terms of Belief Formation and Emergence), but let us allow it to stand for the moment and return to it when it becomes more pertinent to our discussion.

In the end, Lewis comes to realize the faith fully while being driven to the zoo one morning. He characterizes this experience – though we might question to what extent it can be considered discontinuous – as involving neither logos nor pathos to any significant degree:

> When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion…It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake. And it was, like [the previous occasion involving surrender] ambiguous. Freedom or necessity? Or do they differ at their maximum? At that maximum a man is what he does; there is nothing of him left over or outside the act.

One of the most prominent motifs in these accounts has to do with the question of the will. Lewis emphasizes the idea that God imposes some kind of overriding order on his life, so that the discovery of Christ is an inescapable conclusion – hardly something that is up for discussion. And yet, it is obvious from the preceding passages that he isn't exactly bullied or coerced into changing. He retains the power of choice (even if at times he expresses discomfort concerning the consequences of his decisions). When his new self materializes – Christian, unbuckled, or what-have-you – it does so in solidarity. Internal contradiction melts.

Augustine was also acquainted with these mechanics of rebirth. He describes his turmoil while in the garden with Alypius, just moments prior to his own Emergence:

> Finally, in the very fever of my indecision, I made many motions with my body; like men do when they will to act but cannot, either because they do not have limbs or because their limbs are bound or weakened by disease, or incapacitated in some other way…Many things I did, in which the will and the power to do were not the same. Yet I did not do that one thing which seemed to me infinitely more desirable, which before long I should have the power to will because *shortly when I willed I would will with a single will*. For in this, the power of willing is the power of doing…(8.8, emphasis mine)

At the same time, Augustine, like Lewis, repeatedly accredits his choices to divine agency. Thus it would appear that, in both cases, Emergence rests on a peculiar tension between being in control and not being in control.

This tension in some ways parallels what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi terms "Flow," a specific and enchanting state of blissful raptness often present in the consciousness of artists and athletes wholly engaged in their activities. In fact, he refers to a key characteristic of Flow as "the paradox of control," which involves the requirement that an individual engage herself in a situation where the outcome is uncertain in order to generate a meaningful experience of being in control. Perhaps because this is done willingly, flow lacks "the sense of worry about being in control that is typical in many situations of normal life." (59)

According to Csikszentmihalyi, Flow entails the growth of consciousness; thus individuals in the state of flow are necessarily extended or linked to a future self that is larger than the present self. This being the case, we could say that one variety of control rests on the boundary between these two selves. And we might conjecture that during Emergence, the present self voluntarily releases its grasp on that boundary, in effect taking a 'leap of faith' into the self beyond.

Another condition that can be observed during both Flow and Emergence is what Csikszentmihalyi refers to as "the merging of action and awareness." (53) In fact, elements of his description of this property mirror Lewis' narration of his transformation during the trip to the zoo so closely that it

would be just about possible to roughly superimpose one over the other:

> [A] person's attention is completely absorbed by the activity [in which flow is present]. *There is no excess psychic energy left over* to process any information *but what the activity offers*. All attention is concentrated on the relevant stimuli.
> As a result…*people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes almost automatic; they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing*.
> (53, emphases mine)

And while it is not as explicit in Augustine as in Lewis, we can infer a similar unity between identity and action in his story. He indicates that, upon reading the words of Paul, his heart is "infused" with "something like the light of full certainty," melting all of his doubts. (8.12) Furthermore, he records the fact that Alypius joins with him in "full commitment without any hesitation." (8.12) Csikszentmihalyi observes that such clarity of intent is an inevitable byproduct of this kind of amalgamation:

> In normal life, we keep interrupting what we do with doubts and questions. "Why am I doing this? Should I perhaps be doing something else?" Repeatedly we question the necessity of our actions, and evaluate the reasons for carrying them out. But in flow there is no need to reflect, because the action carries us forward as if by magic. (54)

In any event, perhaps the most crucial link between Flow and Emergence (and one that we have already encountered in small part), is a phenomenon common to each process that involves the simultaneous giving up and unfolding – or, in more religious terms, death and rebirth – of the self. Actually, this particular paradox isn't just a sensation associated with Emergence; it is the very threshold through which the emerging self must pass, and possibly the reason for all the additional Flow-like characteristics it assumes.

Other scholars have written about this dimension of religious experience, suggesting, "the activation and application of spiritual abilities involves both the enlarging and shrinking of the self." (Paloutzian, Richardson, and Rambo; 1047) The term "shrinking" is probably inadequate to describe what happens to the psyche in Emergence, however. It might be more appropriate to say that the perimeter of the self is surrendered or smudged, so that the old identity loses its definition or vanishes where the new one comes into being. Again, Csikszentmihalyi expounds upon the process:

> Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the boundaries of our being have been pushed forward.
> This feeling is not just a fancy of the imagination, but is based upon a concrete experience of close interaction with some Other, an interaction that produces a rare sense of unity with these usually foreign entities. (64)

Curiously, recent research in 'neurotheology' has demonstrated that, for mystics, monks, and others who are inclined to have intense religious experiences, the areas in the brain that commonly assist in distinguishing between the self and the outside world are often disengaged or inactive during prayer and meditation. (Newberg, 251-266) At this point, whatever the neural correlates of religious experience, it seems supererogatory to remind ourselves of the centrality of the Other in the stories of our two converts. Nevertheless, it explains a lot. Given our analysis thus far, it should come as no surprise to *us* that Lewis, at the conclusion of his spiritual journey, realizes that his hunger is not for the experience of Joy itself, but rather for the supreme Other that Joy has been compelling him towards. In addition, it becomes clear why all the times he endures the "stab of Joy" are also times when he is momentarily lost or absorbed in a realm outside of himself.

Victor Frankl, a prominent psychiatrist and survivor of the Nazi concentration camps of world war two, is well aware of the reality that "being human always points, and is directed to something, or someone, other than oneself – be it a meaning to fulfill or another human being to encounter." He

explains further:

> The more one forgets himself…the more human he is and the more he actualizes himself. What is called self-actualization is not an attainable aim at all, for the simple reason that the more one would strive for it, the more he would miss it. In other words, self-actualization is possible only as a side effect of self-transcendence. (115)

So finally, I think we have come full circle in our investigation of Emergence, and can attempt to nail it down on some greater level of sophistication. We know that (1) it involves the growth or re*creation* of the self, and (2) this is possible only when the boundaries of the 'present' self are given up, which (3) occurs when self-consciousness is lost because one's will is engaged entirely in some entity beyond the self, and (4) ultimately results in a sensation or awareness of unity with that entity. We have also seen that the concept is not exclusive to religious experience and that it can, in all probability, be used to illuminate any occasion on which an individual finds herself transformed or expanded. Accordingly, the nature of the unity that manifests in consciousness during the process depends on the particular Other with which the self is involved. Csikszentmihalyi furnishes us with examples addressing the range that is possible in this regard:

> [T]he solitary sailor begins to feel that the boat is an extension of himself…The violinist, wrapped in the stream of sound she helps to create, feels as if she is part of the "harmony of the spheres"…In a chess tournament, players whose attention has been riveted, for hours, to the logical battle on the board claim that they feel as if they have been merged into a powerful "field of force" clashing with other forces in some nonmaterial dimension of existence. Surgeons say that…they have the sensation that the entire operating team is a single organism…(64-65)

Of course, for Augustine and Lewis, and perhaps millions of converts throughout the course of history, the unity experienced is of a very specific nature: it is the fusion of the human and the Divine. The new self is nothing short of consubstantial with God. And there is no reason to discount these claims, anymore than there is an empirical way of verifying them. Either way, the Emergence paradigm obtains.

We are indebted here to Kenneth Burke, not only for the application of the word 'consubstantial' to our discussion, but for his rhetoric on the whole, having at its crux "identification," which, he asserts, is possible because of "ambiguities of substance." He reasons that such ambiguities yield "transformability," and that where they are found, it is possible for one entity to be representatively changed into another, even though the two remain distinct, using the metaphor of parent and child to demonstrate how this is possible. (79-83)

This is, of course, precisely what transpires during Emergence. To become a Christian is quite literally, in a metaphysical sense, to become a part of the body of Christ. So it would be entirely accurate to conceive of Emergence as a radical branch of identification (radical in the sense that its orientation is towards the transcendent, and moreover that it involves both release and reconstitution of the self in one foul swoop). Burke himself speaks of "the mystic's devout identification with the Source of all being," and suggests that the domain of identification "includes the realm of transcendence." (Hochmuth-Nichols, 101-102) What we have begun to investigate is one means by which the boundaries of the self are actually rendered ambiguous, making the kind of "transubstantiation" in question possible.

But at this point we are past due in attending to the other side of the coin: Belief Formation. For we know that there are numerous versions of transcendent reality with which individuals have identified over the course of history, many of them – at least at first blush – mutually exclusive. And they are not only construed in theistic terminology: they include Plato's form of the Good, the nondual state of Nirvana in Buddhism, the inalienable rights of "man" in the American constitution, fate, and even the inescapable dynamics of class in Marxism. Never mind the fact that disparities between certain factions of Christianity are, in and of themselves, sometimes-sufficient grounds to

question the similitude of even the most fundamental figures (e.g. grace or Christ) within different denominational settings. (I am indebted to professor Margo Husby-Scheelar for this insight). In actual fact, the more we look, the more we are faced with a vast and confusing array of claims with regards to the matter of the ultimate nature of things, each having essentially one thing in common with the rest: that it is virtually impossible to prove or disprove any of them scientifically.

If we ask how we can know which of these paradigms is correct, we'll join the ranks of theologians and philosophers who've been trying to agree on an answer to that question for hundreds upon hundreds of years. So let's take a look at another question more suited to our discussion: If an unaided, reason-based approach will neither refute nor authenticate premises about transcendent reality (that is, if the *scientific method proper* renders none of them with an authoritative claim to the truth), then how is it that individuals actually do come to believe? In other words, what is the cause of Belief Formation in situations involving the incorporeal, like the ones we are interested in, where the accessible external evidence can't confirm or deny the belief being formed?

One way of approaching this issue undoubtedly involves the precipitatory aspect of Emergence, which we alluded to much earlier. If an individual becomes identified with "the realm of transcendence," it follows in most cases that she should also, at very least, come to accept the predication that such a realm exists. Moreover, *if* she believes, or comes to believe – and forgive me if, at the present turnoff, our attempt to solve the Belief Formation question seems almost tautological – that the same realm she identifies with is embodied by a set of principles, then she will also, more likely than not, come to accept those principles. It is not uncommon for conversions to Christianity to conform to this sequence of events. Particularly during large crusades and revivals, individuals routinely give themselves over (or up) to God at the altar, and are in a sense transformed into Christians without knowing much, if anything, about what they've gotten themselves into (or, perhaps, what they've gotten into themselves). Only later do they come to understand many of the peripheral, and often central, tenets of the faith.

According to Golden, Berquist, and Coleman, the rhetorical imperative of the evangelists who conduct such events is twofold. First, they must "make real a problem in the lives of [their] congregation," or "weave a symbolic reality dominated by a major exigency," which arouses internal contradiction (or dissonance) strong enough to inspire them to act. (347) Second they must persuade their audience that the view they espouse – or in this case, the Jesus they espouse – is the answer to that problem, and thereby induce them to surrender totally to that Jesus. Surrender (in the sense of giving up the self) is, as we have seen, the mainspring of Emergence.

The "indoctrination stage," as Golden, Berquist, and Coleman duly observe, occurs later and isn't necessarily handled by the same evangelist who triggers the convert's initial decision to 'accept Christ.' Its aim, of course, is to "consolidate the gains…*within* the evangelist's symbolic reality." (349) In some churches I've attended, this is referred to as 'follow up ministry,' or 'discipleship.' In addition to ensuring permanence, it completes the conversion by educating the convert with regards to her newly assumed identity as it is defined by the Church, with which she is now consubstantial.

Of course, the effect that education has on *shaping* experience (as opposed to merely explaining it) cannot be overlooked. We must recognize that education is essentially a function of communication, which, in the words of Jill Freedman and Gene Combs, "isn't neutral or passive." (29) They have this to say about its impact:

> In agreeing on the meaning of a word or gesture, we agree on a description, and that description shapes subsequent descriptions, which direct our perceptions toward making still other descriptions and away from making others. Our language tells us how to see the world and what to see in it…

> Every time we speak, we bring forth a reality. Each time we share words we give legitimacy to the distinctions that those words bring forth. (28-29)

These remarks closely parallel Burke's notion of terministic screens. He reminds us that "even if any given terminology is a *reflection* of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a *selection* of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a *deflection* of reality." (45) Consequently, whatever terms we employ when we communicate "direct the attention into some channels rather than others." (45) And every time our attention is stirred, the resulting commotion becomes a part of the overall noetic inertia of our lives. Our consciousness is *historically affected* (the phrase is from Gadamer) by the terms with which we navigate the universe. One term leads to another, and the new term to another, and so on and so forth. Hence, "much that we take as observations about 'reality' may be but the spinning out of possibilities implicit in our particular choice of terms." (46)

A convert's inculcation with the nomenclature of her newly acquired identity necessarily serves to direct her awareness towards certain elements of her situation at the expense of others, and causes her to see the significance of those elements within the perimeters of that nomenclature. It is act as well as description. Phenomenon as well as explanation. And so, when we apply the idea of terministic screens to our subject matter, it becomes evident that Belief Formation is rooted in the dynamics of language and history. Each term we have encountered in the past is on some level directing (or selecting) thought in the present.

David K. Jordan discusses a manifestation of this phenomenon that is specific to Chinese culture, which he refers to as "glyphomantic logic." Glyphomancy, entrenched in Chinese superstition and spiritual tradition, is the dissection of written characters into sub-characters in order to find hidden or esoteric meaning in the words. Glyphomantic insight is commonly used by evangelists as a tool to prove, justify, and authenticate Christianity amongst the Chinese, because it is viewed as "a compelling demonstration of Christian truth: a reason to become a Christian and a reason to remain one." (289) By pointing out, for example, the fact that the character for 'sheep/goat' is part of the characters for 'virtue' and 'beauty,' evangelists establish a link between the latter characters and the Lamb of God, which, in turn, is thought to demonstrate that "Gospel truths are embedded in Chinese characters." (288)

Naturally, Jordan infers that glyphomantic logic is a specific and singular example of a more widespread feature of conversion.   For him, it shows that "sectarian (including Christian) 'truth' is demonstrated by the congruence of sectarian teaching with the already established wisdom of Chinese tradition." (289) The important implication here, and one that extends beyond Chinese culture, is that "there is a hierarchy of philosophical truth, in which the familiar is prior and superior to the unfamiliar, which is evaluated in its terms." (289) The distinctions we have made in the past (distinction-making being a utility of language) are epistemic cells, proliferating in our psyche, animating the larger semiotic system they together comprise, a system in which all of us symbol-using animals are inescapably enrolled.

Burke speaks eloquently of the power of words to move human beings (today's motion, true to Newtonian principles, being tomorrow's momentum). He likens his analysis to Paul's observation that "faith cometh by hearing," which suggests that terminologies live and flourish within individuals:
> Do we simply use words, or do they not also use us? An "ideology" is like a god coming down to earth, where it will inhabit a place pervaded by its presence. An "ideology" is like a spirit taking up its abode in a body: it makes that body hop around in certain ways; and that same body would have hopped around in different ways had a different ideology happened to inhabit it.

So now, in a roundabout way, we have discussed two mechanisms of Belief Formation, specifically ones that obtain in situations where the belief in question is not subject to empirical methods of evaluation. First, we have seen that Emergence can cause or dispose us to accept certain beliefs, to the extent that it constitutes a powerful form of subjective -- or intersubjective -- proof with regard to those beliefs. Second, we have worked out the effects of *noetic inertia* – the inevitable epistemic consequences of the terminologies we employ. But in order to round out our analysis of the subject, let us turn to an article by Ward Jones that deals with the rhetoric of Pascal's wager.

Jones identifies two kinds of rationality that it is possible for a belief to embody: epistemic and practical. "We can say that a belief is *epistemically* rational," he writes, "if it is well supported or likely to be true." (172) On the other hand, practically rational beliefs are those that help to "fulfill some desire or goal a person has." (172) Hence, if I believe myself to be a better orator than I could legitimately conclude is the case in light of the objective facts, and if that belief imbues me with the confidence required to do a half-decent job on the delivery of some speech I must give, then there is an inherent pragmatic reason to hold it. It is practically rational.

According to Jones, because Pascal is "neither trusting nor optimistic about the belief-inducing power of proofs for the articles of faith," (that is, he recognizes that there is no sure-fire way to confirm Christian doctrines using empiricism alone), he focuses on the practical aspect of belief in his notorious Wager. He seeks to persuade the reader to accept the tenets of the faith, not because they are positively verifiable, but because of what is at stake. He reasons that as long as there is a probability that Christianity is true, the potential gains resulting from conversion overwhelmingly outweigh the potential losses. And because Christianity cannot be decisively proven false, the odds, at least as far as Pascal is concerned, will always favor the believer.

At first glance, the Wager might come across as an ineffective piece of rhetoric, particularly as a consequence of the fact that its objective is stated so explicitly. It would be ludicrous to suggest that an individual could form an authentic belief in Christianity if someone promised her money in return for doing so; and likewise it seems crude to propose high odds of eternal reward as a 'reason to believe.' In fact, Jones agrees. Because of "doxastic involuntarism," he surmises, it is impossible for us to "consciously form a belief because we think that forming it would be good for us, or because we want to form it." (173) Who, after all, would be so naïve – nay, so blockheaded – as to do such a thing?

Not so fast, though! For Jones reminds us of the ideal reader that Pascal has in mind when he engineers his game of chance:

> She desires immortality. While she does not believe the articles of faith, she does not completely rule them out. Consequently, she is moved by reading the Wager, and she becomes fully convinced that it would be [practically] rational for her to form a belief in the articles of faith…(173)

As an individual who doesn't possess conclusive evidence one way or another, but who desires eternal life, and is persuaded by the Wager that her odds of attaining it are superior if she believes in Christianity, she may be moved to further examine whether (and how) it might, in fact, be possible for her to acquire that belief.

The true rhetorical strength of the Wager, then, lies in the power of "affecting inquiry." (173) Of course, it cannot produce Christians directly. It can, however, direct the attention. ("Directing the attention," is not surprisingly, as you will remember, the precise phrase that Burke uses to explain the function of terministic screens). An individual who becomes convinced that believing in Christianity might have some kind of practical benefit – for example, providing her with a sense of purpose, making her a better person, or infusing her life with joy, would at very least be disposed to investigate it seriously.

On a conscious level, she might, as Pascal recommends, begin to attend Church, and "follow the way by which [other converts] set out, acting as if they already believed, taking holy water, having masses said, etc." (Fragment 343) This is, in effect, the action that was undertaken by both Augustine and Lewis. And it is one that has consequences. To begin with, each service that the seeker sits through will have an impact in terms of noetic inertia, further channeling her thinking. By interacting with Christian ideology, she is in the position to become inhabited by it. But in addition, the act of churchgoing by itself represents a kind of commitment on the part of the churchgoer, and may, in part, have the effect of softening her defenses (or, as Pascal suggests, blunting her cleverness) toward Christianity. Because of the deeply entrenched social pressure on individuals to exhibit predictable, congruent behavior (discussed at length in Robert Cialdini, *Influence: science and practice*), there is probably a degree of inherent tension involved in participating (however mildly) in an institution of belief while yet an unbeliever. And one of the most simple and effective ways to solve this kind of tension is, of course, to adopt the beliefs that are consistent with one's behavior.

But again, it seems amiss to imagine an individual forming a belief simply in order to escape the inner turmoil brought on by social forces. At least deliberately. Which leads us to consider another realm of the mind that influences Belief Formation: the unconscious. This is probably where the more relentless – if more subtle – forces have their effect as they relate to the subject at hand, for in essence, they direct our awareness *without* our awareness.

For a makeshift example, we can imagine a father who is "in denial" of the fact that his child is a horrendous murderer. His son has recently been arrested, and it would be devastating for him to admit the reality of the situation to himself. Even though he may claim to want to know only the truth, his subconscious desires cause him to see the facts selectively, or to fail to make the same connections that everyone else so immediately perceives. "How can they possibly think my son is guilty of this crime?" he exclaims. "Isn't it as obvious to everyone else as it is to me? Clearly, he's innocent!" But, unbeknownst to him, he is the one who is unable to see the world as it is. His desires are acting unconsciously to screen out certain facts and to weave the remaining ones together in a way that supports his fantasy.

Similarly, potential converts who have some reason to want to acquire a belief in Christianity (like the ideal reader of the Wager), or who simply, on some level, want Christianity to be true, will be subject to the influence of those desires at an unconscious level. Certain events in their environment will be recorded as significant or meaningful, some less so, and some may not register at all – all of this being handled unmindfully and involuntarily from some place deep within the psyche. They will be looking, without even knowing it, for evidence that supports Christian doctrine!

On the subject of intrapersonal rhetoric, Burke writes, "indeed, what could be more profoundly rhetorical than [the] notion of a dream that attains expression by stylistic subterfuges designed to evade the inhibitions of a moralistic censor?" (87) If we amend the passage so that 'dream' becomes 'subconscious desire,' and think of moralistic censorship in a broad sense, it is easy to see Burke's relevance here. As far as the "parliamentary wrangling" of the various individuations of the psyche goes, the stealth of the subconscious is indeed one of its weapons of persuasion.

William James also comments on the role of the subconscious in bringing about religious conversion. He uses the analogy of attempting to remember someone's name. While engaged in the effort, it is an impossible task. Minutes or hours after withdrawing from the attempt, however, the name suddenly "pops" into one's awareness: "Some hidden process was started in you by the

effort [to remember], which went on after the effort ceased, and made the result come as if it came spontaneously." (202) James' *Varieties of Religious Experience* is full of conversion narratives that seem to observe this kind of pattern, which he portrays as a central element of "man's liability to sudden and complete conversion." (225) "When the new center of personal energy has been subconsciously incubated so long as to be just ready to open into flower, 'hands off' is the only word for us," he explains. "It must burst forth unaided!" (207)

And so, by way of James, we have returned again to the phenomenon of Emergence, to the bursting forth of the new self. And in all probability, we have located a realm where our two processes come together more unhesitatingly than anywhere else. In the visceral, instinctual domain of the unconscious, the distinction between faith and being melts into an amorphous desire-laden goo. After all, desire is the fabric of conversion. Augustine got his first taste from *Hortensius*. Lewis had his while he was yet a boy. In both of their cases, desire was the force that turned them towards God, brought them to the point of belief, and compelled them to Emerge as they did. Without desire, nothing in their lives would have transpired in the same way.

On the other hand, changes in the self produce new wishes, as do changes in belief. Hence, there is no straightforward answer to the question, "do I make my desires, or do they make me?" In the end, all that can be said really, is that our lives are like rivers of desire, pouring forward into some unknown destination, sometimes angrily carving new channels in the ground, sometimes moving smoothly and with ease, sometimes streaming into an ocean or a lake, always ever incessantly flowing. At all times, then, as a consequence of desire, are we transformed, and do we become the people who we want to be.

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[i] In using the word "Emergence," it is not my intention to reduce a convert's newly experienced identity to what arises from the combination of the various mundane elements in her environment, or to some idea involving a dynamic evolution of the events in her life. At the same time, I would not be inclined to suggest that the context in which Emergence occurs has no importance whatsoever. I have chosen the word for its ambiguity; it can have the connotation of a matrix, wherein one thing materializes as an extension of a number of other things that have come together (as in a revolution that emerges within a certain political climate), but it can also imply circumstances in which the thing that emerges does so without the direct influence of its context (as in a vehicle that emerges from a fog). And even if we prefer the first connotation, we have not necessarily excluded God and transcendence from our model. We might easily see God as part of the context in which the process occurs.

If we imagine ourselves as a shaft of light Emerging from the darkness, we can see that there is even, in some situations, a kind of haziness with regards to the division between these two connotations. We don't exist *because* of the darkness; we are in fact constituted at odds with it. Yet without darkness in our environment, our essence wouldn't be measurable in the way that it is. Our substance isn't an evolution of darkness, but darkness influences the form that we take, or the manifestation that we assume – at least in the eyes of whoever is watching us. Similarly, we might suggest that the milieu of an individual's conversion, which includes her own psychological and spiritual history as well as the gamut of social, technological, and religious influences on her life (hopefully not all of them dark), has an effect on the nature of the new identity she embodies when her faith is ignited.

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