

SYMPOSIUM

Reply to Symposiasts*

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TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES AND THE DECISIONS involving them are special. One reason the experiences are special is because of their epistemic inaccessibility: as individuals, we cannot accurately imagine and evaluate them the way we ordinarily would. This leaves us without an internal guide. We can't look within ourselves to accurately assess or forecast our response to the experience. So there's a gap in our model for how to make the decision: a hole where we'd normally plug in the value of what it's like to have the experience in order to evaluate it. If we can't know how we'd value the options we are to choose between, we can't make an informed, rational choice.

Can we fill this gap by relying on what others can tell us? Should we replace our internal guide on value with the advice given by our best science and the most reliable testimony we can find? Perhaps science can

think clearly where we can't, and guide us to act in the way that's most likely to maximize our happiness. In essence, then, can we look to the science to tell us what we need to know?

In one sense, yes. Expert advice solves the value gap problem, because it gives us information about values that we can't get for ourselves. In another sense, no. Telling us we'll be happier by choosing one option over another can help us pick the option that is likely to maximize happiness, but it doesn't do this by helping us understand what that option is like. For example, consider a congenitally blind adult who navigates the world well but who wants to have a retina operation. I can tell the blind man that if he becomes sighted, green will be his favorite color, but this doesn't teach him what seeing green is like. Similarly, I can tell a person that she'll be happier if she becomes a mother, but

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this doesn't mean she knows what being a mother will be like.

Knowing what your life will be like can be important when you make this kind of choice. Not merely because we care about the nature of lived experience. Although, for most of us, it does matter to us what our futures will be like – will our lives be happy? Will our choices make us feel fulfilled? – it isn't just this. It's also that making the choice often involves significant tradeoffs.

If the blind man gains ordinary vision, his ability to navigate the world will likely decrease, since his cognitive abilities and skills, honed over a lifetime of blindness, will not adapt straightforwardly to life as a sighted person. He will likely experience significant changes in his relationships with others, especially those close to him, like his spouse or his children. People will treat him differently, and their expectations for him will change. A woman with a thriving career who takes time off to have a child will likely experience lower earnings and slower advancement. People will treat her differently, and their expectations for her will change. Perhaps her choice would be easy but for the fact that she lives in a world where becoming a mother entails the likelihood that she'll experience significant career costs and incur heavy social and personal obligations. It is highly likely that she will have to give up something that she cares about dearly if she chooses to become a parent. (As Paul Bloom points out in his essay, finding oneself in this type of choice situation is especially common in the United States.) Even if, on balance, a person will be happier after being transformed, the choice may come with serious costs, and knowing the nature of the life you are choosing can help you understand why these costs are the ones you are willing to bear.

Moreover, this isn't the only thing you need to make sense of when you consider a choice involving a transformative experience. Trying to decide how you'd like your future life to develop doesn't just involve attempts to foresee what a transformative experience

will be like. That's because transformative experiences are special for more than just their epistemic inaccessibility: they are special because they change who we are. In particular, they change some of our core preferences, in effect changing the kind of person we are. So your decision also involves attempts to foresee what being this new "you" will be like.

This means that the edifice of our choice model stands on shifting sands: in virtue of having the transformative experience we've chosen, we change what we care about. What is right for us to choose will change in virtue of making the choice itself. The trouble here comes from how, on the usual story, when you make a big decision, you are supposed to base your choice on what you care about most. But if who "you" are changes as part of the transformation you choose, and this new you is impossible to know (from the inside) ahead of time, then this ordinary story fails to guide you through a crucial point of ambiguity. When you base your choice on what *you* care about most, which "you" matters for your choice? Who you are now? – or the mysterious new "you" that the change will create?

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In Paul Bloom's beautifully constructed dialogue with the vampire, he explores these ideas, focusing on how to draw on expert testimony and what we know from the experience of others when making a transformative decision. Bloom's argument with the vampire takes us through many of the relevant twists and turns. Should you become a vampire? You can't know what it's like unless you become one. So how do you decide, especially if you are unsure? If you attend to your gut feelings, you shouldn't. It's gross and alienating and foreign. You'll be happy you didn't do it. If you attend to the expert testimony, you should. It'll be liberating and wonderful and amazing. You'll be happy you did it.

This is the situation we can find ourselves in for many potentially transformative deci-

sions. In essence, when we lack the ability to assess the situation for ourselves, and especially when our gut feelings don't coincide with the expert advice for a transformative decision, how should we choose? Following Bloom's lead, we should remember that gut feelings can be misleading and not lose sight of the science that lights our way. So perhaps we should conclude that, when the expert testimony, or the science, tells us what will make us happiest in such a situation, we should simply choose that option. So: become a vampire, since vampires just love being vampires. You'll be fine.

Maybe. I agree with Bloom that if empirical research can tell us about what can make us happiest, we should listen. In particular, even if it can't teach us what the experience will be like, it may be able to tell us how we are likely to respond, or what we are likely to testify to afterwards. But: does this mean that, in this situation, the right thing to do is to just choose whatever seems most likely to make us happy?

Not necessarily. That's because this decision has a complex structure, one that requires careful scrutiny. There isn't a simple decision to make here, because there isn't a simple explanation for how the action will affect you. As Bloom's vampire observes: «you're in a situation where the decision you [will make] turns out to be the best one, even though, when you look at it another way, [you'll] concede it's the worst one».¹ What does this mean?

It means that, if you choose to have the experience, it will change who you are. This affects the way we understand how the decision "turns out".² For if having the experience is what makes you happy that you've done it, then there isn't an independent way of evaluating whether it's right for you. Think about it this way: everyone who has had a frontal lobotomy seems very happy and content afterwards. Experts predict that if you do it, you'll be happy too. But is this a good reason to have a frontal lobotomy?

Of course not. Now, the decision to be-

come a vampire doesn't involve a lobotomy, but if there is something about becoming a vampire that makes you want to be one, then the fact that people like you are happy when they become vampires doesn't necessarily mean that you, as you are now, should want to become a vampire. What the testimony tells you is that vampires are very happy to be vampires. That is: the advice and testimony of those who were transformed matters, and certainly applies to people like you, but it applies to people like you *who were reborn as vampires*. And you, right now, are not a vampire. Yes, if you were bitten, you'd become one, and it's likely that you'd be happy if you did become one. But right now, why should you care about becoming something so alien to you – a vampire that drinks blood? Why should you care about what some alien version of you – if you were so twisted as to choose to become a vampire – would enjoy? In other words: vampire testimony can apply to who you'd become. But right now, it doesn't necessarily apply to you, the person making the choice, because you are not a vampire.

Ultimately, what Bloom's discussion with the vampire brings out so beautifully and clearly is that we need to think carefully about the reasoning we are using to make a transformative choice, because it isn't just a choice about happiness. It's a choice about what kind of person you want to be. And this isn't something that experts, or even other people, should decide for you. There is a distinctive kind of authenticity that rational, transformative decision making requires of us, and once we understand this, we can distinguish between a merely perverse or gut-level rejection of what experts recommend, versus an informed rejection of a particular kind of life. As Cass Sunstein points out in his *On Freedom*, reminding us of Huxley's *Brave New World*, sometimes we prefer to choose unhappiness in exchange for the freedom to remain ourselves.

"All right then", said the Savage defiantly,

“I’m claiming the right to be unhappy.”

“Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat, the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.”

There was a long silence.

“I claim them all”, said the Savage at last.³

Authenticity, in transformative contexts, means you choose knowingly, with understanding. If you choose to transform, in accordance with expert advice, you don’t choose *merely* because you think you’ll be happy with your choice afterwards. You choose because you want to discover what it’s like to become that new self, that new kind of person. If you choose not to transform, perhaps choosing a path that will bring suffering and loss, you do so because you prefer not to be that kind of self. Perhaps you choose to stay much the same, to embrace your current self, embracing your current values. Or perhaps you find yourself choosing between transformative options, and so you must choose to discover one kind of life over another. If you are choosing knowingly and authentically, you choose knowing that the deep structure of the choice concerns the kind of self you want to become.

So a transformative choice, at bottom, isn’t just about maximizing happiness. It’s about deciding whom you want to be. If you choose to become a vampire, it isn’t simply because, after listening to the experts, you learn that it’s simply the right choice for you. Rather, if you choose to become a vampire, with full understanding of what your choice involves, your choice is explicitly one of reconstruction. You choose to give up your human life to discover the life of a vampire. Instead of caring about human things, you’ll

care about vampire things. You exchange life in the sun for life in the shadows.

And if you choose to remain human, it isn’t simply because you are being perverse, or failing to understand that as a vampire you’d have been happier that way. If you choose not to become a vampire, with full understanding of what your choice involves, your choice is explicitly one that rejects the self-reconstruction that is part and parcel of the act. You choose to keep your human life, and human cares, and reject the desires of a vampire life.

Once we see the structure, we can use it to better understand the kind of ambivalence some people experience when faced with big life decisions like whether to have a baby. The same way of understanding the choice is available to those who are deliberating parenthood, for, in essence, this deliberation has the same structure as the vampire decision. Should you become a parent? Perhaps you are deeply ambivalent. You’re told you’ll experience joy and meaningful love. Parents tell you they are so happy they’ve done it. Yet, especially if you are female, if you have a baby, you’ll take a career hit. Your goals of travel and success may become unattainable.

If you find your intuitions about how to choose being pulled in contrary directions, the inaccessibility of knowing what this life-defining experience will be like leaves you without an internal guide. But, as with the vampire choice, the solution is not to have others tell you what to do, or to unreflectively choose based on what psychologists tell you will make you happy. That’s because, again, the choice isn’t merely about what would make you happy. It’s about which future self you want to discover.

If you authentically and rationally choose to become a parent, you choose to reconstruct yourself and your life around your child. Authentically and rationally choosing to become a parent means choosing to discover a new kind of self, a new way to live your life, one that you can’t know until you actually become that self. Authentically and

rationally refusing to become a parent means that you choose to remain childless, not because you know what being a parent is like, but because you choose to keep your current life and to be your current self, at least for the time being.

This allows us to explain why we can reject the paternalistic idea that people who choose not to have children are simply unable to recognize what's best for them. Even if they'd be happier as a parent, they may reject this, choosing authentically to remain who they are. In rejecting parenthood they are choosing in accordance with their current preferences, in accordance with who they are now. It isn't that they somehow lack the self-awareness needed to recognize what they really, down deep, should prefer, or that they are being obtuse or perverse. Instead, they are authentically embracing their current selves.

And on the other side, those who authentically choose to become parents are embracing the unknown. They are opening themselves up to the joy and suffering and discovery of transformation, and willing to do the work of reconstructing themselves. They are not choosing to become parents because they already know what it will be like, or because society pushes them in that direction (this is a point of contact with Sartre and Beauvoir). They are not choosing parenthood simply because they have been told by the experts that it will make them happier. Rather, they are choosing it in order to discover who they will become, in order to discover what this new life will bring.

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This brings us to Jenann Ismael's characteristically deep and engaging criticism of my approach. On my view, the special kind of unknowability that transformative decision-making brings forces us to confront a basic feature of modern life. Even apart from the ordinary types of contingency that we confront daily, we must recognize that, for certain kinds of big life decisions, we cannot

know who we are making ourselves into until we actually take the plunge. If living involves this kind of choosing to become an unknown self, how can we do so authentically? Ismael presses me to make my ideas here clearer, and to be more open to giving imagination and uncertainty a central role in living meaningfully.

Ismael is correct to note that I am teasing out an element of authenticity that is different from the Sartrean concept. My concern is not, in the first instance, with determining whether your actions flow from your true self rather than some externally imposed authority. (Although, as I noted above, this concern arises when we contemplate the role for expert testimony in our decision.) Rather, my primary concern is with how we are to make rational and reasonable sense of our lives, and to expect things from ourselves, given the uncertainty and unknowability of who we might become. We cannot eliminate this kind of unknown, nor should we pretend it does not exist. Ismael says it very beautifully when she concludes «Living should be about transformation and genuine transformation involves uncertainty».⁴

In the end, I want us to embrace this uncertainty, to embrace knowing what we cannot know, and to embrace the discovery that comes when we choose. Authenticity in choice, then, means choosing for the right reasons, and in the right way, understanding that your choice may change who you are, in ways that you cannot foresee until you undergo the change itself. We should understand and judge ourselves and others in the richer and more subtle way that this perspective entails. In particular, in transformative contexts we should not always expect people to know ahead of time what they are getting themselves into, even if we still hold them responsible for their choices. We can then separate responsibility for a choice from praise and blame for an outcome, and allow that, in some contexts, a person couldn't have foreseen who she'd become even if we hold her responsible for her choice.

Thus, I agree with Ismael about the importance of understanding the uncertainty that transformation entails. I also agree with her that we should try to cultivate our imagination in order to better understand those who are very unlike ourselves, those who have had transformative experiences that we have not had. On this point, however, our views do not completely align. In particular, I am much more skeptical than she is about our ability to use our imagination to understand, from the inside, those who have had experiences that are very different from ours. I agree that we can train our imagination to do a better job than it otherwise could, and that trying to understand others is important. But I'm skeptical about how much we can really achieve here. For example, I do not think I can know what it's like to be attacked, or diagnosed with a terminal illness, or to lose a parent, without actually having had those kinds of experiences. (Ismael agrees with me, of course, that you cannot know everything important about what an experience is like in these cases, but I think she is more optimistic about how effectively we are able to imagine ourselves into such situations.)

I maintain that, without the right experiences, try as we might, we still can't use art or imagination to leap the epistemic wall.⁵ Even with the best effort and will in the world, there is a crucial element that evades us. Novels, documentaries, and art can teach us much, and they do help us sympathize with those who have suffered. Yet, they inevitably and essentially fall short. We cannot use them to cross the boundary from observer of experience to subject of experience. They bring us important information, they help us, and yet, they are not enough to teach us, to really teach us, what such experiences are like.

If you doubt this, try telling a veteran that you know what it is like to have fought in Vietnam because you've seen a graphic film about the war. Or try telling a sufferer of breast cancer that you know what it's like to receive a terminal diagnosis because you've

read a novel where the narrator takes you imaginatively through that kind of experience. I think you will find that they will resist your optimism, and I suspect that you will also sense, intuitively, that there is likely something that you are missing.

So the epistemic wall remains. However, what we can do, following Ismael's insights, is to try harder. We should try to use our imagination to make us more sympathetic to the testimony of others and attach a higher credence to their judgments than we might otherwise do, were we to rely solely on what we can glean from our own imaginative assessments. In particular, because I suspect that the inaccessibility of the experiences of people who are very different from ourselves can be the source of epistemic injustice, we must work to correct for this, granting that they might have privileged access to the nature of these experiences. Once we recognize that there may be principled epistemic reasons for why we cannot, no matter how hard we try, grasp the degree and nature of the pain and suffering of someone who faces challenges quite different from any we've faced, we can improve our moral and practical understanding, judgment, and assessment of their acts.

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Ismael and Bloom encourage us to see transformation as part of life, and to see the value of it. I agree. Like Ismael, I also think that we should learn to understand and embrace the uncertainty it brings. If we do so, when we choose to transform, we can do so both rationally and authentically. Doing so requires us to recognize that we cannot always see forward clearly, but to accept this as an element of making the decision. This theoretical conclusion raises practical concerns for real world transformative decision making. How are we to do this? How should we approach these decisions?

The practical and psychological puzzles of transformative decision making are highlighted by John McCoy and Tomer Ullman's

incredibly interesting contribution, which points us towards new and exciting ways to combine empirical and philosophical approaches to the questions surrounding the metaphysics and epistemology of the self as it relates to decision making. They introduce a new puzzle: what's the source of the *decision agony* that (real life) transformative choice can bring? As they point out, transformative decisions can be agonizing when we confront them in real life. What's the source of this agony? How does this relate to the computational process of transformative decision-making?

Their paper brings out a number of new and fascinating points. They note how transformative decisions can seem fun when they are merely imagined, contrasting this to the difficulty of making them in real life. Moreover, as they point out, part of the computational task of assessing preferences involves the job of forming your preferences in the first place. If your decision model is incomplete because of the epistemic inaccessibility of the transformative option, you may not have the resources to perform your task.

To separate the phenomenological out from the computational, McCoy and Ullman consider a Decision Making Machine (DMM) that cannot deliberate using a simple, fully specified model.⁶ Like an ordinary person in a real life case, it cannot know the right subjective values, so it faces an epistemic wall. It cannot make a rational choice if it must choose based on comparing what its outcomes would be like. Exploring the way a DMM would deliberate in this context can help us get a better sense of the computational tasks involved in making a transformative choice. In turn, this may help us to answer the key question: what is the source of the decision agony that arises in real life transformative contexts?

It's not merely that the stakes are high, because an ordinary high stakes choice wouldn't cause such agonizing in a person, much less a machine: It's not merely that it takes a lot of computational resources to per-

form the task. It's not merely because the DMM can't assign values to all of its options, because even ordinary people report that imagined transformative decision making is enjoyable to contemplate and engage in.⁷

The DMM thought experiment suggests that something deeper is going on. If a DMM wouldn't agonize, then it isn't a simple matter of computation that creates the difficulties. McCoy and Ullman suggest a plausible alternative: when a person faces a transformative decision, this creates, at once, the need to face uncertainty while shrinking one's opportunity to live different kinds of lives. Choosing to transform is choosing to cordon off future possibilities, forcing you to shut the gate on some of your possible future selves. Not being sure which self to give up, combined with an epistemic wall that makes you unable to see down each possible path before rejecting it, creates agony. When you make a transformative choice, you must leave these other paths behind, forever unexplored.

If who you are is in part a matter of how you'd respond to different possible changes in yourself and your environment⁸, we can see how the agony of decision making has clear connections to the philosophical questions I've been raising about authenticity and the existential dilemmas about whom to become.⁹ Which selves can you bear to give up? Which selves do you choose to embrace? Which selves are too dangerous for you to allow yourself to even consider? These and other suggestions raised by McCoy and Ullman are philosophically interesting, and even more excitingly, can show us how to frame some of the questions surrounding transformative decision making in productive, testable ways.

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If the agony of transformative decision making comes, at least in part, from how a decision requires us to shut out possible selves; to shut away possible lives, then in contexts where we can't "have it all", the agony may be especially keen. That is, often, a

transformative choice involves important tradeoffs. It comes with a cost.

Recall our original examples of a congenitally blind man who is contemplating gaining ordinary vision, and of a woman with a thriving career and social life who is contemplating motherhood. In both of these examples, the decision is hard in part because the world is not structured in ways that accommodate these choices. If you are not congenitally blind, the world is organized around you and others whose dominant sense modality is vision, and so you don't have to make hard choices about whether you prefer autonomy to having the chance to live with your family as a sighted individual. If you are not a professional woman considering motherhood, you don't face the difficult tradeoffs that stem from the ways that contemporary women still can't "have it all".

We can now see the connection to Krister Bykvist's interesting and critical contribution to the discussion.¹⁰ Bykvist, one of the founders of the contemporary discussion of personal transformation,¹¹ rightly situates my work in current debates over the nature of decision making involving known unknowns (sometimes described as "unknown unknowns"). For example, the possibility of developing an artificially intelligent agent (an AI) that could surpass anything a human could do brings many unknowns. How are we to decide whether to create such an AI, or if we do create it, what kinds of possibilities, opportunities, and dangers does it bring? How are we to control it? It's safe to say that at this point, we know that we don't know. Such an AI brings many known unknowns, and with it, many significant challenges for rational decision making.

However, Bykvist wants to separate my account of epistemic transformation from the discussion of personal transformation when discussing life-defining choices, hoping to hive off contemplation of the unknown from contemplation of self-change. Unfortunately, such a separation cannot succeed. Epistemic transformation in life-defining cases

is inseparable from the account of personal transformation, because such cases are precisely those where a profound epistemic transformation scales up into a personal transformation. It is because transformative experiences are both epistemically and personally transformative that we must attend to the nature of the lived experiences that they bring, that is, what the outcomes would be like, and consider the personal implications of decisions involving them.

A central feature of the dispute between us concerns the balance one should strike between the contribution made by our assessment of objective values as opposed to our assessment of subjective values. I think both matter: we care about both kinds of value. Bykvist disagrees with me on the importance of assessing subjective value for transformative decisions, pressing me to include more consideration of objective moral values when discussing transformative decision making. I take the point: I absolutely agree that objective moral values need to play a role in who we make ourselves into, just as much as I think they should play a role in the more ordinary choices we make every day.

My view is not that the puzzles of transformative decision making arise only when we can exclude consideration of objective values. It is not that we put the objective values aside. Not in any way. Rather, my point is that the puzzles of transformative decision-making arise because, for many of these intensely personal, life-defining choices, we cannot rely solely on objective considerations. They do not decide the matter, and so there is an important role for subjective considerations as well.

The importance of assessing subjective values can be most apparent when a person has to make a life choice in a world that has not been set up in ways that accommodate her situation, where there is no objective moral prerogative. Think back to our examples of the congenitally blind man or the professional woman, making hard choices in an unfriendly world, and recall McCoy and

Ullman's insightful discussion of the cognitive difficulties and decision agony with transformative choices.

We agonize over such choices. Why? Not because we don't know what the objective moral values are. When we agonize over transformative choices, the primary source of our agony seems to stem from our inability to determine and decide between our subjective preferences and subjective values. Not because the objective values don't matter, but because the objective values by themselves are insufficient to determine one path over another, and we care deeply about the subjective elements involved. In the real world, we rarely find ourselves in a situation where the objective moral guidelines point us clearly down one path as opposed to another, and in cases of transformative decision-making, we think our subjective preferences matter, for we are choosing whom to become, and whom to reject. Perhaps, as McCoy and Ullman's piece suggests, the essence of the subjective difficulty is that the choice requires a person to permanently choose between selves, to shut off one self as opposed to another. Without the ability to see into one's prospective futures, it can be agonizing to try to make an informed choice about which self to give up and which self to keep.

So the cases of transformative choice that I am focusing on are cases where a person must make a hard decision, one that has different subjective costs and benefits depending on what is chosen. When choosing, the blind man wants to consider the subjectively positive value of a life filling with things like being able to watch movies and sunsets with his family members when he decides whether to become sighted, and to contrast it with the subjectively negative values that come from losing his comfort and ability to successfully navigate his world. (Those who have grown up blind often develop keen auditory and proprioceptive abilities to navigate the world that are irreplaceably lost when they gain the capacity to see, and for various physical and cognitive reasons, the new visual abilities

cannot compensate for these losses.) He can't have a life that is sighted if he keeps his current life, so which does he prefer? When choosing, the woman who is deliberating over motherhood wants to consider the subjectively positive joy of having a baby in order to compare it to the subjectively positive value of having a successful career unfettered by family constraints. She can't have both, so which life does she prefer?

In these cases, a person must choose between different kinds of lives, giving up one kind of life for another. In such cases, it is natural to want to know what each kind of life would be like, that is, to know the subjective value of each kind of life one could have. These subjective values are not merely "phenomenological values, as such", but rather, values of lived experiences, the value of living a life *like this* versus living a life *like that*. To choose, irreversibly, one sort of life for the other, and to do so in an informed way, requires a careful consideration of the subjective values involved.

Moreover, the assessment of the subjective values of these experiences requires an understanding of their phenomenal character. As I argue in my book, experience teaches us how to value: the phenomenology unlocks the content for the knower. While we may be able to make a conceptual distinction between the phenomenal and the nonphenomenal, given the way that actual human psychology works, in cases of transformative experience we cannot have the requisite nonphenomenal knowledge of the lived experience without first gaining phenomenal knowledge of the lived experience. For example, without actually discovering what it will be like to stand in the identity-changing, loving attachment to the actual child I create (or adopt), I cannot know how I'll experience and thus respond to the various things I'll need to give up and the various things I'll gain through becoming a parent. (As every parent knows, reading picture books to a toddler or singing a child to sleep has a special kind of quality when the child is one you

love and cherish as your own. The experience is different, somehow, and more subjectively valuable, when it's your own child. This plays out, in ways large and small, for many choices in your life, for example, when you choose to read and play with your baby instead of completing an important work project.)

When a choice is easy, because there isn't really anything that central or important to one's identity that one must give up, perhaps we can treat subjective values as an indulgence, a mere gloss on what's really important. But a context where the choice is hard, where one can't "have it all", one wants to know what one is giving up in order to understand what is being lost forever. This is why caring about the nature of your lived experience is not mere "texture fetishism", as Bykvist suggests. It is not selfishness, nor an abandonment of objective moral values. It is, rather, something we turn to in order to help us make an informed life choice that involves significant tradeoffs. An attempt to assess subjective value is an attempt to respect the nature of one's inner life and the inner lives of others, so one can decide what to reject and what to keep, as responsibly and authentically as possible. If this sort of caring about the nature of your future is "texture fetishism", then it is the diagnosis for those of us who refuse to ignore human feelings and human sensibility.

In my work, I want to grant the importance of subjective assessment and subjective value to how we think about our lives and the lives of others, while denying that we can assess these values in many kinds of transformative contexts. But the solution is not to hide in our ivory tower, denying the importance of emotion and feeling in the hopes that this will somehow make us rational. Instead, we must face the difficulties, and look for alternative models, ones that allow us to embrace revelation, feeling, and the importance of discovery.

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To close, I wish to thank all of my critics

for their excellent, insightful, and impressive contributions. I'm honored to have such a distinguished set of commentators engage with my work, and to have the chance to respond to their thoughtful and penetrating remarks. I thank them for their time and care, and I am grateful for the way they have pushed me to think harder and better about transformative experience and decision making.

Notes

¹ P. BLOOM, *Arguing with the Vampire*, in: «Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. X, n. 3, 2019, pp. 320-329, here p. 327.

² For related discussion, see C. STARMANS, P. BLOOM, *Nothing Personal: What Psychologists Get Wrong about Identity*, in: «Trends in Cognitive Sciences», vol. XXII, n. 7, 2018, pp. 566-568.

³ A. HUXLEY, *Brave New World*, Chatto & Windus, London 1932.

⁴ J. ISMAEL, *Experience, Transformation, and Imagination*, in: «Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. X, n. 3, 2019, pp. 330-338, here p. 332. For a brilliant exploration of how to live and understand decision making in our natural law-governed natural world, see J. ISMAEL, *How Physics Sets Us Free*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016.

⁵ Cf. N. ARPALY, *What is it Like to have a Crappy Imagination*, in: J. SCHWENKLER, E. LAMBERT (eds.), *Themes in Transformative Experience*, Oxford University Press, Oxford - forthcoming.

⁶ J. MCCOY, T. ULLMAN, *Transformative Decision and Their Discontents*, in: «Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. X, n. 3, 2019, pp. 339-345.

⁷ Cf. J. MCCOY, L.A. PAUL, T. ULLMAN, *Modal Propection*, in: A. GOLDMAN, B. MCLAUGHLIN (eds.), *Metaphysics and Cognitive Science*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, pp. 235-247.

⁸ Cf. S. MOLOUKI, S.Y. CHEN, O. URMINSKY, D.M. BARTELS, *How Personal Theories of the Self Shape Beliefs about Personal Continuity and Transformative Experience*, in: J. SCHWENKLER, E. LAMBERT (eds.), *Themes in Transformative Experience*, Oxford University Press – forthcoming: «First, people have beliefs about the structure of their self-concept – how the different personal aspects are causally related to each other. Second, people have theories about the ways in which their personal qualities will change in the future – how

they will develop into the person they expect to become. We propose that personal changes and experiences that are more inconsistent with either of these two types of theories are perceived as more disruptive to the self-concept, and thus more transformative».

⁹ There are interesting relations here to Kierkegaard's exploration of rationality and the self through the lens of religious transformation. See S. KIERKEGAARD, *Either/Or: a fragment of life*, translated by A. HANNAY, Penguin, New York 1992; L.A. PAUL, *Transformative Religious Experi-*

ence, in: «Episteme», forthcoming.

¹⁰ K. BYKVIST, *Paul's Reconfiguration of Decision-problems in the Light of Transformative Experiences*, in: «Rivista internazionale di Filosofia e Psicologia», vol. X, n. 3, 2019, pp. 346-356.

¹¹ See K. BYKVIST, *Prudence for Changing Selves*, in: «Utilitas», vol. XVIII, n. 3, 2006, pp. 264-283; E. ULLMANN-MARGALIT, *Big Decisions: Opting, Converting, Drifting*, in: «Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements», vol. LVIII, 2006, pp. 157-172; D. PARFIT, *Reasons and Persons*, Oxford university Press, Oxford 1984.