

## **Yale Workshop on Experience and Transformation November 8 & 9, 2018 // Abstracts**

This event will explore transformative experience in connection to rational decision theory for our changing selves and how the latter may or may not survive through personal, epistemic and doxastic revelation. It will delve into the importance of subjectivity and values, examine how art can bring about forms of transformative expression, and search for the limits of our imaginative powers. It will investigate some of the barriers that come with (dis)ability and the transformative nature of joining a new community.



**“Choosing for Changing Selves”**  
**Richard Pettigrew, Bristol**

What you value and the extent to which you value it changes over the course of your life. A person might currently greatly value pursuing philosophy, and value spending time in nature much less; but, having watched their parents as they have grown older, and noting that they are very much like their parents, that person might have good reason to think that they will value the pursuit of philosophy much less when they are sixty, and value spending time in nature much more. Given that we make our decisions on the basis of what we believe about the world and what we value in the world, the fact that the latter may change throughout our lives poses a problem for decision-making — in particular, for making decisions whose consequences will start to be felt or continue to be felt later in our lives. To which values should I appeal when making such a decision? My current values? My future values at the time when the decision will have its most significant effect? My past values? Some amalgamation of them all — past, present, and future — perhaps with some of them given more weight than others? (If so, how are the weightings assigned?) Or such an amalgamation only of a few of them? (If so, which ones?) In this book, I aim to provide a comprehensive account of rational decision-making for agents who recognise that their values will change over time and whose decisions will affect those future times. Included in the analysis will be not only agents who recognise that their values will inevitably change in certain ways, but also those who recognise that some of their decisions will lead to consequences that will change their values — thus, in effect, they will choose to change their values.



## **"The need for non-replacement models of transformation"**

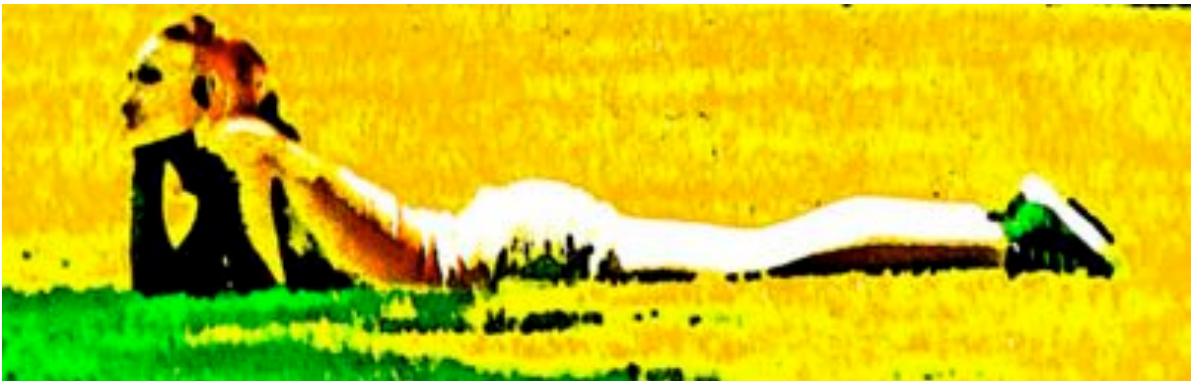
**Enoch Lambert, Tufts**

Some novel, life-changing experiences that alter core desires, goals, and prospects are experienced by some as affecting a self that endures its effects. Such experiences include successes and failures in goal pursuit, liberation and bondage, gain and loss of certain capacities. Such experiences suggest the need for alternatives to Paul's replacement model of personal transformation wherein transformation results in numerically distinct selves. They also point toward other avenues of transformative decision making, such as assessment of one's adaptive capacities, which I argue can be rational and authentic.

## **"Either/Or: Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Value"**

**Katalin Balog, Rutgers**

Kierkegaard has written extensively on a philosophical distinction between subjective and objective thought in the context of religious belief. I argue that his underappreciated distinction has important ramifications for central questions in ethics: in ways that have not been widely appreciated, subjectivity plays a key role in constituting value.



## **"Joining A Signing Deaf Community: Language and Transformative Experience",**

**Teresa Blankmeyer Burke, Gallaudet**

Chapter 2 of L.A. Paul's book *Transformative Experience* considers the experience of a parent making the decision of whether to provide their<sup>[2]</sup> deaf child with a cochlear implant. In this case, the transformative experience involves the acquisition of a sensory ability -- that of hearing. Paul characterizes this as an either-or choice of

implant or cultural identity, which while convenient for staking out the argument, I believe is mistaken and does not sufficiently reflect the current state of this discussion within the Deaf community. The first part of my essay provides a more nuanced analysis of the current discussion within the signing Deaf community.

Following this, I turn to the flip side of the discussion of sensory ability and transformative experience, considering the decision of whether to join a signing Deaf community from viewpoint of the deaf person who is not a member of a signing community. I will consider both the case of a deaf person who has acquired the dominant spoken language of the community, as well as the case of a deaf person who has acquired communication, but not language. I will argue that this satisfies the criteria of both personally and epistemic transformation set out by Paul, and considering that the opportunity for full access to language is an interesting test case for subjective deliberation.

### **“Risking belief”**

**John Schwenkler, Florida State**

How should we evaluate the risk and opportunity involved in choosing for or against experiences that have the potential to change our deepest beliefs? I'll argue that phenomena of *doxastic transformation* deserve to be considered alongside the phenomena of *epistemic transformation* and *personal transformation* described by Paul (2014), and that they raise a set of philosophical puzzles parallel to the ones that Paul describes. I'll consider some possible ways of responding to these puzzles, then make the case for the one I prefer.

### **“Transformative Expression and Participatory Art”**

**Nick Riggle, San Diego**

The hope that art could be personally or socially transformational is an important part of 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde work, and it shaped a movement away from traditional media in an effort to make social life a medium. Artists imagined and created participatory situations designed to facilitate potentially transformative expression in those who engaged with the works. In this paper I develop the concept of ‘transformative expression’ and illustrate how it informs a diverse range of such avant-garde works. I argue that understanding these works in this way raises two interesting questions, one about the nature of aesthetic value and the other about the nature of action. Answers to these questions lie in understanding the



social and aesthetic character of our capacity for certain kinds of expressive, spontaneous, or playful action.

### **“What is it like to have a Crappy Imagination?”**

**Nomy Arpaly, Brown**

The Trouble with Human Imagination consists of two facts: the fact that we have a very limited ability to imagine the lives of other people and of future selves and the fact that, when it comes to the lives of other people and future selves, we trust our puny imagination to an unwarranted extent, often trusting it more than we do reliable testimony and other good evidence. These facts go a long way towards explaining why we are so often surprised by the experience of changing and especially dumbfounded when the change is in our intrinsic desires. There is often no need to posit, in addition, any kind of irreducible “knowing what it’s like” that only experience can bring.



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