

Transformative Experience Workshop  
Yale University  
April 1-3, 2022

Location: Faculty Room, Second Floor of Connecticut Hall (1017 Chapel Street)

All members of the Yale Community are welcome, as well as all visitors who comply with these policies: <https://covid19.yale.edu/visitors-policy>. All attendees should fill out the following form: [https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_5p6pLYCuFfwDE1g](https://yalesurvey.ca1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_5p6pLYCuFfwDE1g)

## Schedule

### Friday, April 1

- Noon – 1:30 PM: Richard Pettigrew "Nudging for Changing Selves" (delivered via Zoom).  
1:30 – 2:45 PM: Lunch Break  
2:45 – 4:15 PM: Antony Aumann "Art, Imagination, and Experiential Knowledge."  
4:30 – 6:30 PM: Grace Helton and Chris Register "Hot-Cold Empathy Gaps and the Grounds of Authenticity." **PREREAD**  
Comments by Olivia Bailey.
- 7:00 PM: Dinner (New Haven pizza, TBA).

### Saturday, April 2

- 8:30 – 9:30 AM: *Coffee, tea, and bagels*  
9:30 – 10:30 AM: Vlad Chituc and Molly Crockett, "How much does subjective value matter?"  
10:45 AM – 12:15: Kate Abramson, "On Being Grateful for the Choices Made By the Person I Used to Be."  
12:15 – 1:30 PM: *Lunch Break*  
1:30 – 3:00 PM: Barbara Montero and Sam Coleman, "Unconscious Transformative Experience."  
3:00 – 3:15 PM: *Break: Coffee, tea, and snacks*  
3:15 – 4:45 PM: Ben Bagley, "Authenticity."  
5:00 - 7:00 PM: Vida Yao "Eros and Anxiety." **PREREAD**  
Comments by Daniela Dover.
- 7:30 PM: Dinner at El Segundo (367 Orange Street, New Haven)

### Sunday, April 3

- 8:30 – 9:30 AM: Coffee, tea, and bagels provided by Koffee Catering.  
9:30 AM – Noon: Sophia Dandeleat "Permissivism, Accuracy, and the Love of Truth."  
Comments by Timothy Williamson.

## Talks and Abstracts

### Friday, April 1

Noon – 1:30 PM: Richard Pettigrew "Nudging for Changing Selves." (delivered via Zoom)

Abstract: When is it legitimate for a government to 'nudge' its citizens, in the sense described by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein (Thaler & Sunstein 2008)? In their original work on the topic, Thaler and Sunstein developed the '*as judged by themselves*' test to answer this question (5, Thaler & Sunstein 2008). In a recent paper, L. A. Paul and Sunstein (Paul & Sunstein ms) raised a concern about this test: it often seems to give the wrong answer in cases in which we are nudged to make a decision that leads to what Paul calls a *personally transformative experience*, that is, one that results in our values changing (Paul 2014). In those cases, the nudgee will judge the nudge to be legitimate after it has taken place, but only because their values have changed as a result of the nudge. In this paper, I take up the challenge of finding an alternative test. I draw on my *aggregate utility account* of how to choose in the face of what Edna Ullmann-Margalit (2006) calls *big decisions*, that is, decisions that lead to these personally transformative experiences (Chapters 6 and 7, Pettigrew 2019).

2:45 – 4:15 PM: Antony Aumann "Art, Imagination, and Experiential Knowledge."

Abstract: I argue that works of art can help us imagine what it is like to have experiences we have never had before. I begin by surveying a few of the things we are after when we ask what an experience is like. I maintain that it is easy for art to provide some of them. For instance, it can relay facts about what the experience involves or what responses the experience might engender. The tricky case is the phenomenal quality of the experience or what it feels like from the inside. Thus, in the main part of the paper, I discuss several ways in which art can provide us with this too. I conclude by situating my view in the context of the debate over transformative experiences. I claim that art can solve some but not all of the problems that arise when deciding whether to undergo a transformation.

4:30 – 6:30 PM: PREREAD: Grace Helton and Chris Register "Hot-Cold Empathy Gaps and the Grounds of Authenticity." Comments by Olivia Bailey.

Abstract: In this paper, we take up *hot-cold empathy gaps*, wherein subjects' predictions about their own and others' behavior are skewed in the direction of the 'hot' or 'cold' states subjects themselves are in. Here, 'hot' states are emotionally valenced states, such as hunger and pain, and 'cold' states are their complements, such as feeling full and feeling free of pain. We make four claims: First, the relationship between hot-cold gaps on the one hand and practical and moral ends on the other is complex. Second, the best psychological view of hot-cold gaps is one on which they result when subjects import their current hot or cold states into a first-personal imaginative process, i.e., one of simulation. Third, the predictions made on the basis of such simulations do not constitute knowledge, even when they are accurate. Fourth, these considerations can be used to show that a view of authenticity endorsed by L.A. Paul, on which authenticity sometimes requires knowledge from simulation, is more proscribed than one might have thought. We close by briefly sketching a rival view of authenticity.

### Saturday, April 2

9:30 AM – 10:30 AM: Vlad Chituc and Molly Crockett, "How much does subjective value matter?"

Abstract: Recent philosophical work has taken interest in the decision-theoretic problems posed by transformative experiences, which are roughly as follows: if we cannot know what it's like to be a parent (its subjective value) before actually becoming one, then how are we to decide whether or not to become one? This topic has received recent empirical attention, some of which has challenged the central importance of subjective value for transformative decision-making. Briefly, this work argues that participants don't weigh subjective value as being particularly important when making transformative decisions. If it is the case that subjective value is not important in real-life decision making, then the inaccessibility of such values is not a threat for practical decisions in transformative contexts, since we can rationally decide based on the information that is accessible. Here, we present empirical work to suggest a novel interpretation of these findings: they are explained by the evaluability bias, in which people weigh

decision criteria not based on their importance, but how easy they are to evaluate. Here, we review the literature on the evaluability bias and present empirical work which suggests that participants do find subjective value important, and they report being willing to pay a great deal of money to get this information. Furthermore, participants who were most uncertain about whether to undergo a transformative decision were most likely to report interest in seeking out information about subjective value. We conclude by considering the philosophical and empirical implications of this work.

10:45 AM – 12:15 PM: Kate Abramson, "On Being Grateful for the Choices Made By the Person I Used to Be."

Abstract: In the wake of Paul's groundbreaking work, some have thought the appearance of genuine transformative experiences an illusion-- merely an artifact of our ordinary (and perhaps not even ineliminable) epistemic, imaginative and/or moral limitations. Here's one very crude version of that doubting thought: going to college, getting married, getting divorce, raising a child doesn't *change who you are* in any deep sense—you just think it does because you aren't sufficiently self-aware about who you are now and/or who you were then. Here I want to suggest that what these doubters are picking up on is a real and very common feature of transformative experiences, namely, they nearly always admit of a kind of backward-looking intelligibility. That is, self-reflective and self-aware transformed people can often tell an intelligible story about the path that led from the person they used to be to the person they are now. Importantly, these stories typically involve not merely invocation of the "experience" that transformed (not even under a very detailed description), but specific *reasons* that that experience altered, amended, and/or dissipated elements of the agent's former subjective motivational set. In fact, the *inability* to tell such a story will tend to make us doubt claims of self-transformation. And yet, although the availability of this kind of backward-looking intelligibility (usually rational intelligibility) can explain some of the temptation to doubt the reality of transformative experience, it does not, I think, spoil Paul's central claims. More positively, this common backward-looking intelligibility can make rational sense of the fact that we are sometimes *grateful* – in a way that is not *mere* metaphor-- for the choices we have made under the conditions Paul describes, and even for unchosen transformations of this sort.

1:30 PM – 3:00 PM: Barbara Montero and Sam Coleman, "Unconscious Transformative Experience."

Abstract: It is commonly held that unconscious emotions, perceptions, and sensations can affect our future preferences and choices, but can such unconscious mental processes be transformative in the sense that they could not only change a fundamental aspect of who we are but also provide us with a unique means of understanding what these unconscious experiences are like? In other words, could unconscious mental processes ever amount to what Laurie Paul refers to as a "transformative experience"? By analyzing a range of examples involving putative unconscious emotions, perceptions, and sensations, we aim to make sense of unconscious transformative experience and explore the various ways in which unconscious experiences could be transformative.

3:15 PM – 4:45 PM: Ben Bagley, "Authenticity."

Abstract: L. A. Paul has argued that there are certain major personal decisions which it would be objectionably inauthentic to make on the basis of indirect evidence like testimony, especially when that evidence conflicts with what one presently deeply desires. But while Paul's claim is intuitively compelling, her view of the nature and importance of authenticity can seem pretheoretically too conservative, and in any case fails to show how we can be justified in acting authentically when it conflicts with what would (otherwise) be expectedly best. Accordingly, I propose an alternative view, on which authenticity consists in a willingness to act from one's present valuing of particular ends, independently of one's higher order judgments of what would be best to value. Authenticity in this sense is a virtue, I argue, because there is an important class of goods we can only access when we are motivated in this way—where being guided by our higher-order judgments would be self-defeating.

5:00 - 7:00 PM: PREREAD: Vida Yao "Eros and Anxiety." Comments by Daniela Dover.

Abstract: L.A. Paul argues that transformative experiences challenge our hopes to live up to an ideal that she believes is upheld within western, "wealthy" cultures. If these experiences reveal information to us about the world and ourselves that is in principle unavailable to us before we undergo them, it seems that there is no hope for us to be rational, authentic and autonomous "masters" of our own lives. Supposing that Paul is right about this, how concerned should we be? Here, I challenge the ideal of rational self-mastery that guides Paul's project, and which must be granted in order to motivate the philosophical challenge purportedly generated by experiences that drastically change who we are and what we know.

Sunday, April 3

9:30 AM – Noon: Sophia Dandeleit "Permissivism, Accuracy, and the Love of Truth." Comments by Timothy Williamson.

Abstract: According to *naive permissivism*, whether a belief state is epistemically permitted depends only on the believer's evidence. According to *standards permissivism*, by contrast, whether a belief state is epistemically permitted depends both on the believer's evidence and on her epistemic standards. Despite the theoretical costs that attend the more sophisticated view, some permissivists have embraced it in order to avoid the so-called *arbitrariness objection*. But I will argue that standards permissivism cannot satisfy this motivation any better than naive permissivism can. My argument for this thesis also serves as a plea for greater open-mindedness about what counts as a distinctively epistemic reason for action.