

Transformative Experiences and Counterfactuals

Should I become a vampire?

Should I move to a different country?

Should I get married?

Should I have a child?

Should I take this job?

Transformative Experiences

- Certain experiences we cannot know what experience will be like— and it's consequences— until we undergo the experience; an epistemic challenge
- But also, many new/unknown experiences are personally transformative; will change your life and what it is like to be you

Epistemic Transformation

- Experiencing color for the first time can't be fully anticipated until it has been experienced; can't learn it by being told, have to experience it
- Knowledge of what something is like and subjective point-of-view changes
- Understand things in new way, gain new information
- Depends on how much one already knows, and the experience involved

- Stories, testimony, and theories aren't enough to teach you what it is like

Personal Transformation

- Some experiences can change your point of view, and by extension, your personal preferences, and perhaps even change the kind of person that you are or at least take yourself to be.
- horrific physical attack, gaining a new sensory ability, having a traumatic accident, undergoing major surgery, winning an Olympic gold medal, participating in a revolution, having a religious conversion, having a child, experiencing the death of a parent, making a major scientific discovery, or experiencing the death of a child.

Two Forms of Transformation

- Can be epistemically transformative, giving you new information in virtue of your experience.
- Can be personally transformative, changing how you experience being who you are.
- Some experiences may be epistemically transformative while not being personally transformative, like tasting a durian for the first time. Some experiences may be personally transformative without being epistemically transformative.

Both Epistemic and Personally Transformative

- Having a transformative experience (both personal and epistemic) teaches you something new, something that you could not have known before having the experience, while also changing you as a person.
- Choices involving transformative experiences, that is, your transformative choices, allow you to causally form what it will be like to be you in your future.

Autobiographical Memory: Episodic and Semantic

- Endel Tulving distinguished between *episodic* and *semantic* memory (Tulving, 1983)
- **Episodic Memory:** mental representation of the self as the agent or patient of some action, or as the stimulus or experiencer of some state
 - *I gave a present to Lucy on her birthday and Lucy made me very happy yesterday*
- **Semantic Memory:** is more generic, context-free knowledge about the world. Doesn't necessarily have to be in self-reference.