**Identity, Subjective Deliberation, and Transformative Choice**

Chieh-Ling (Katherine) Cheng

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**Abstract** L. A. Paul suggests that the transformative nature of life decisions prevents us from making choices rationally, and her solution to this problem is to choose on the basis of revelation. This paper challenges her view by suggesting that her argument overlooks the importance of choosing in accordance with commitments and personal projects. Moreover, her argument overlooks this way of approaching life choices because Paul assumes a notion of the self that is too thin. I suggest that adopting a robust notion of the self allows us to reinterpret life choices and reformulate our approach to them.

1. **Introduction**

How do we deliberate and rationally make decisions when facing life choices? According to normative decision theories, a rational decision normally requires carefully evaluating one’s choices, assigning expected values to the outcomes of choices, and deciding in accordance with the highest expected value. However, there are things about life choices and the way we normally approach them that appear to prevent us from doing what would be required to make our choices to count as rational.

According to L. A. Paul (2014), we normally approach life choices by thinking about *what it will be like for us* to live a certain life. For example, when choosing whether or not to become parents,[[1]](#footnote-1) people typically weigh their options by thinking what it will be like for them to become parents. However, life choices such as becoming a parent are usually *transformative*. They teach us something new and change us deeply. In Paul’s words, they are both *epistemically* and *personally* transformative. Because of their transformative nature, Paul claims, we are epistemically blocked from knowing what certain life choices will be like for us, given that we cannot predict their outcomes, and because who we are may be substantially changed by such decisions. This epistemic impoverishment then makes it difficult to assign expected values to our choices, as required by normative decision theories. To get around this difficulty, Paul suggests, we need to approach life choices differently, which is to consider what we may *discover* by choosing a certain life, rather than thinking what it will be like to have a certain life.

I suggest that such reasoning lacks nuance. It is perhaps true that we are epistemically blocked from knowing what a transformative choice will be like for us. Nevertheless, it does not follow that we had better choose in terms of “revelation,” as Paul suggests (2014, 38-39). In particular, I suggest that we can choose in accordance with our commitments and personal projects, and such choices count as rational. I will develop this point, first, by examining Paul’s conception of our normal deliberative processes over life choices and arguing that her conception is too limited, as it overlooks an important component of how we deliberate over life choices (section 2). I will then draw on Elizabeth Barnes’ and Rachel MacKinnon’s critiques of Paul to explain what her account lacks (section 3). Afterwards, I will suggest that the reason why Paul overlooks this component is because she assumes a notion of the self that it too thin, in the sense that it pays little attention to our identities, their associated commitments and projects, and how all these things affect our deliberation and decision-making (section 4). Adopting a robust notion of the self that recognizes these will allow us to reinterpret transformative choices and reformulate our approach to them (section 5).

1. **Epistemic Transformation and Subjective Deliberation**

According to Paul, the transformative nature of life choices prevents us from engaging in *subjective deliberation*, the deliberation process that is primarily concerned with what a decision’s outcome feels like from our first-person perspective (2014, 25). The epistemic transformation and personal transformation each impede subjective deliberation in their own ways. In this and the next section, I will primarily focus on issues surrounding epistemic transformation. I will discuss personal transformation only after issues surrounding the notion of the self have been sufficiently discussed.

On Paul’s view, the idea of subjective deliberation has to do with the norm that we conceive of ourselves as agents that take charge of our own lives (105).[[2]](#footnote-2) As an agent, “you chart your future, deliberating and reflecting on who you really are and what you really want from life, and, once you’ve determined your preferences, you determine the right course and act accordingly” (105). This kind of deliberation is subjective because it primarily concerns who you are and what you care about. Subjective deliberation stands in opposition to objective deliberation, which primarily concerns the objective outcomes of a decision, for example, its objective moral consequences. This opposition is not to claim that subjective deliberation must not concern the objective moral outcomes of a decision. It can, according to Paul, as long as the deliberator cares about those objective moral outcomes.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Results of subjective deliberation are the *subjective values* of decision outcomes, especially the subjective values of what it will be like for us to live a certain life. On Paul’s view, the subjective values reflect our preferences and the things we care about. A choice with the highest expected subjective value is supposed to be the one that we prefer and care about the most. We then choose rationally by choosing the option with the highest expected subjective value.

In order to obtain such subjective values, Paul claims, our subjective deliberation needs to involve *imaginative projection*. Imaginative projection is to “project” yourself into an expected future and then “imaginatively represent” what it is like for you to experience that future (2014, 10). To put it differently, you paint a future in your mind, put yourself in it, and then see how you feel about it. We only know the subjective values of our choices’ outcomes when we exercise our imagination in this way. However, Paul claims, when it comes to life choices, we typically cannot know the subjective values by exercising imaginative projection, because the choices are epistemically transformative.

Think about the myriad kinds of transformative choices people face: having a child, moving to a new country, etc.[[4]](#footnote-4) One often hears people say: “I do not know how I feel about the decision, I have never done anything like this before.” People say so because life choices usually involve something dramatically new for a person. In fact, the involvement of something dramatically new is partly what makes life choices epistemically transformative, on Paul’s view. Consider a person who already has a child and is thinking about having a second one. Having a second child is not so much a transformative choice because she already has some sense of what having a child is like. By contrast, having a child for someone who has never had a child before would be epistemically transformative since has no sense of what having a child is like for her.

Furthermore, without similar past experiences, one lacks conceptual resources relevant to exercise imaginative projection. We typically draw on our past experience when imagining the future. A person who already has a child can more easily imagine what it may be like to have another child, by drawing on her experiences of having the first child. Her experiences of having her first child give her some conceptual resources to paint a picture of where she has another child, put herself in it, and imaginatively represent what it might be like. However, one who has never had a child cannot engage in such imaginative projection. When it comes to transformative choices, which involve radical novelty,[[5]](#footnote-5) one does not have the relevant conceptual resources that one would normally draw from past experiences. One is thus incapable of imagining what the choice will be like for her, and thereby unable to determine the subjective value of the life lived after the choice. [[6]](#footnote-6)

As we have seen so far, Paul’s view that epistemic transformation impedes calculating subjective values has to do with her idea that one is incapable of imaginative projection in the subjective deliberation over life choices. Paul’s suggestion for getting around this impediment, then, is to choose on the basis of revelation. As she claims, “some experiences…have subjective value in virtue of what they teach us through the discovery of lived experience, a value that extends past their first-order qualitative character” (92). Thus, “we might choose to have an experience because of its revelatory character, rather than choosing it because what it is like to have it is in some way pleasurable or enjoyable” (93). In other words, she suggests that we approach transformative choices differently, and evaluate our choices in terms of a different kind of subjective values, the subjective values of revelation, rather than in terms of the subjective values of what it is like to live a certain life.

On my view, this reasoning makes too big of a leap. Granted that one cannot exercise imaginative projection to obtain the subjective values of what it will be like to live a certain life, it does not necessarily follow that the only remaining option is to deliberate over the values of revelation. There is another component in subjective deliberation which one can invoke to choose rationally, namely, the evaluation of the *openness* of choices, which concerns whether one views a choice as genuinely open to her, given the way she is as well as her personal commitments and projects. This evaluation gives us the subjective values of perceived openness.[[7]](#footnote-7)

In other words, I suggest that the contrast between, on the one hand, engaging in imaginative projection to obtain the subjective values of what-it-is-likeness and, on the other hand, evaluating the potential discoveries to obtain the subjective values of revelation is a false dichotomy because it fails to consider one’s evaluation of the openness of choices to obtain the subjective values of perceived openness. In addition, it underestimates the complexity of subjective deliberation. While some may question the necessity of adding this component, I suggest that it has an important role in subjective decision-making, as well as in the way we conceive of ourselves, that is captured neither by the idea of what-it-is-likeness nor by the idea of revelation. I will explain its importance by drawing on Barnes’ and MacKinnon’s critiques of Paul’s view in the next section.

1. **Perceived Openness in Subjective Deliberation**

Barnes (2015) uses her personal experience as an example to suggest that sometimes we can rationally choose to live a certain life, even when we do not know what it will be like, and even when we do not choose on the basis of revelation. We can do so because sometime a certain life is the only option that we perceive to be non-alien to us, given the way we are. She describes:

Having always actively desired not to have children, the preferences of post-baby me are completely alien—they violate both my current preferences and my sense of self. I can’t imagine having such preferences, and having such preferences would be in tension with things about myself that I currently place great value on. It’s rational for me to avoid such an experience, and such a change in preferences, even if I don’t know what it’s like to have the experience, or to have my preferences change in such a way (785).

MacKinnon (2015) makes a similar point by using a different example, the example of having gender transition. On her view, people can rationally choose to have gender transition, even when they do not know what it will be like, and even when they do not choose on the basis of revelation.[[8]](#footnote-8) They can do so because remaining birth-assigned gender is too painful, and because there is “an existential need” to transition genders. She describes:

Many of the experiences for trans people who identify with a gender significantly different than their birth-assigned gender (say, someone assigned male at birth but who identifies as female) are that once one comes to understand oneself as trans (and to identify with their gender identity), there’s a feeling of an existential need to transition, and to do it as soon as possible. It becomes all-consuming, often in surprising ways (2015, 9).

On my view, both Barnes’ and MacKinnon’s examples are examples about the perceived openness of options, even though none of they describe their examples using this term. In Barnes’ example, the option of having a child is not perceived as open to her because of her sense of self and the things she values. In MacKinnon’s example, trans people do not perceive the option of remaining their birth-assigned gender as open to them because they identify with a different gender.

Perceived openness captures an important dimension of subjective deliberation. Namely, we evaluate an option by considering whether it aligns with our identities, commitments, and personal projects. Only when there is an alignment will we view the choice as genuinely open to us. In choices that lead to drastically unknown futures, these things (i.e., our identities, commitments, and personal projects) can be, and usually are, our guidance. Consider the transformative choice of curing disability. People who claim that they would choose not to cure their disabilities sometimes suggest that disabilities are parts of their identities. They do not seem to be bothered by the fact that they do not know what it will be like for them to live a life without disabilities, nor are they tempted by the potential discoveries they will have after removing disabilities. As Emily Ladau (2013), a disability rights activist, suggests: “I’ve embraced my disability as a huge facet of my identity, and I take pride in it…. And as tough as certain aspects of my life have been, and though I know I will continue to face disability-related challenges throughout my life, I wouldn’t trade my life for a minute.”

Furthermore, choosing on the basis of what we view as genuinely open to us, drawing on our identities and commitments, count as rational choices under normative decision theories, on my view. It is a way of choosing in accordance with the highest expected value, the value of perceived openness. Here, I expect two possible objections, which suggest that choosing this way does not count as rational. I will only briefly address them here but a fully discussion can be found in section 5. The first objection is, we sometimes do not know whether a choice aligns with our identities, commitments, and projects. In particular, the epistemic transformation that accompanies life choices seems to sometimes prevent us from knowing whether there is such an alignment. For example, I may not know whether becoming a parent aligns with my commitment to my career because I do not know whether I will be able to manage my career while having a child. In such a case, I still cannot rationally choose by considering whether a choice aligns with my commitment.

This worry is reasonable, and I have two responses. One response is that I do not intend my suggestion of choosing in accordance with commitments to be the only way of approaching transformative choices. I simply want to highlight the importance of such a way of making transformative choices. I will thus grant that there are times where we cannot even rationally choose by considering whether a choice aligns with our identities and commitments. Nevertheless, my second response to this concern is that even in those times when openness is not easy to determine, choosing on the basis of revelation may not be the best idea, for revelatory choice risks missing a great opportunity to step back and examine the potential external factors (such as national policies and social norms) that contribute to this difficult situation, thereby motivating us to change what is really making our choices difficult.

The second worry concerns the change of identities and commitments. Since our identities and commitments sometimes change, what we view as genuinely open to us may change as well. Given that we do not know how our identities and commitments will change, we still cannot choose rationally by choosing in accordance with our identities and commitments. While this worry is reasonable, it belongs to the problem of personal transformation, which I will address only after I have sufficiently discussed issues surrounding the notion of the self.

1. **Self and Identity**

The reason why Paul fails to recognize the importance of perceived openness, I think, is that she assumes a notion of the self that is too thin, which I will explain in this section. This thin notion of the self does not pay enough attention to our identities as well as the commitments and projects associated with our identities. A view that assumes such a thin notion of the self then fails to sufficiently recognize that our commitments and projects enter our deliberative processes by shaping the way we perceive our options, namely, as genuinely open to us or not

According to Paul (2014, 2017), the self is something that embodies a particular perspective, identified as the subjective or first-personal perspective. This perspective is “a conscious, centered point of view” that allows us to look out to the rest of the world and plan our life trajectories (2014, 105). The self is also something that has preferences and certain representational capacities, such as imaginative projection. It is something that persists, though not necessarily for a long period of time.[[9]](#footnote-9) When the self, under Paul’s notion, deliberates over its choices, its deliberation is inevitably either about imaginatively projecting itself in a scenario viewed from its subjective perspective, or about discovering what it will learn and how it will change by going through certain experiences.

However, the self is something more than what Paul describes above. The self also embodies identities, and those identities are shaped by personal history and relationships with others in a given community. Those identities can be ethnic, gender, ability/disability, cultural, and class identities. They can also be the identities of a parent, a partner, a colleague, a citizen, etc. Furthermore, those identities are usually associated with certain values, commitments, and projects. Such identities might commit one to engage in disability rights activism or the project of decolonizing education. They can also commit one to taking care of one’s children, to the value of trust and respect in a relationship, or to the project on fostering a supportive work environment.

Our identities are central to who we are. Our identities, as well as our values, commitments, and personal projections, shape our understanding of the world and our perception of our choices. As Charles Taylor suggests: “My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the framework or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what I endorse or oppose” (1989, 27). Or, as Linda Alcoff claims, our identities “have causal determinacy over our epistemic and political orientation to the world—what we notice, what we care about” (2006, 90).

Adopting a robust notion of the self—a notion that recognizes the various identities that one embodies as well as the corresponding commitments and personal projects that one takes on—points us to the importance of the evaluation of perceived openness in subjective deliberation, which needs to be appreciated by a theory of subjective deliberation and rational decision-making on life choices. Under such a theory, a person can rationally make a life decision by choosing what she deems as the only option that is open to her, given her identities, her commitments, and her personal projects.

Moreover, not only can we rationally choose what we deem as the only option that is open to us, but we should also ask ourselves who we are and what we are committed to when facing the uncertainty of life choices. Very often, when we do not know how to make a life choice, it is because we are unsure of what we are really committed to or which identities that we embody matters more to us. And also, very often, the reasons why we are unsure of these things have to do with the factors in our personal relationships and in our society, but not necessarily with the transformative nature of life choices. Only by sorting out those factors can we find a solution for our struggle with life choices.

Now, I expect a possible objection. This objection is that, *contra* my interpretation of Paul’s view, the robust notion of the self is in fact what Paul has in mind, rather than the thin notion of the self. Paul is aware that the self embodies identities and has corresponding commitments and projects. She is also aware that those things influence our choices. For example, when she responds to objections from John Campbell (2015), she clarifies her notion of the subjective value of what it is like to have experiences, such that this notion involves the value of “the lived experiences of other people affected by our decision” (2015b, 810). She claims:

This is especially important for decisions made for those dependent upon us…. If I make a medical decision for my child, my decision is heavily influenced by my assessment of the quality of her future lived experience and the future lived experiences of the rest of the family. If I decide to devote my life to teaching disadvantaged children, my decision is heavily influenced by my assessment of how the childrens’ futures would be improved if I took the job (810).

Given that Paul is aware of the ways one’s role of being a parent and one’s commitment to teaching disadvantaged children influence one’s decision, Paul seems to adopt a robust notion of the self.

I can see that there are lines in Paul’s writing that seem to suggest a robust sense of the self. However, my response is that if a robust sense of the self is indeed what Paul adopts, then she will have trouble sustaining her claim about epistemic transformation. In other words, Paul’s view faces a dilemma. Either her view assumes a thin notion or a robust notion of the self. If her view assumes a thin notion of the self, as I interpret it, then her view overlooks an important aspect of the self and thereby leaves out an important way of rationally approaching life choices, as I suggest. These make her view more limited than what she claims it to be, which is a problem. And if her view assumes a robust notion of the self, then her view faces a problem as well, which is that she will not be able to sustain her claim about epistemic transformation, particularly the claim that epistemic transformation poses a difficulty to relational decision-making, framed in terms of what it is like to live a certain life. I will explain why below.

Assuming a robust notion of the self in subjective deliberation means that a person’s subjective deliberation involves a consideration of her commitments to others and projects she devotes her life to. However, such a consideration makes the subjective values of her choices epistemically *accessible*. Recall that, on Paul’s view, epistemic transformation relies on the idea that we need to engage in imaginative projection to access the subjective values of experiences, understood in terms of the values of the qualitative characters of experiences, but we cannot do so in transformative choices. This premise is challenged when incorporating considerations of commitments and personal projects into the picture. The reason is that a person need not engage in imaginative projection to know what her commitments and projects are (e.g., teaching disadvantaged children), nor need she engage in imaginative projection to know which choice substantiates her commitments and projects (e.g., teaching in a poor neighborhood). The fact that one cannot exercise the capacity of imaginative projection in transformative choices then has no impact on this way of decision-making. The implication that epistemic impoverishment impedes rational decision-making about transformative choices, then, does not follow.

Still, proponents of Paul’s view may object that, even so, there remains something that the person does not know, namely, what it is like to live a certain life (e.g., teaching disadvantaged children in a poor neighborhood). The person then cannot be said to have *sufficient* information for making rational choices. I disagree. At this point, information regarding the qualitative characters of experiences does not seem to matter (see also Campbell 2015). Furthermore, choosing what conforms one’s commitments and projects bring out what Paul calls “a higher-order subjective value that I’d describe as a kind of ‘meaningfulness’” (2015b, 811). It is unclear whether this higher-order subjective value counts as a part of the subjective values of what-it-is-likeness. If it is, then it is arguable that this higher-order subjective value predominately shapes the overall subjective value of what-it-is-likeness. If it is not, then it is arguable that this higher-order subjective value outweighs the subjective value of what-it-is-likeness. Either way, the lack of information regarding the qualitative characters of experiences does not matter. Attempting to refute my view by arguing that Paul in fact adopts a robust notion of the self then does not work, as it creates an internal inconsistency in Paul’s view.

1. **Personal Transformation**

So far, I have suggested that Paul’s view about epistemic transformation, especially the claim that epistemic transformation prevents rational decision-making, assumes a thin notion of the self, but that a robust notion of the self is needed to account for an important dimension of rational decision-making over life choices. As previously mentioned, my view needs to further consider the fact that our commitments and personal projects may change, and sometimes so will our identities. This consideration belongs to the problem of personal transformation that Paul discusses. To what extent this consideration prevents rational decision making over life choices is the focus of this section.

According to Paul, the personal transformation in life choices is concerned with the fact that the dramatically new experiences associated with life choices can “fundamentally change your own point of view so much and so deeply that, before you’ve had that experience, you can’t know what it is going to be like to be you after the experience” (2014, 17). For example, you are a person that deeply values personal freedom, and becoming a parent means that you need to sacrifice your freedom to some great extent. However, the experiences of having a child may turn you into a person who deeply values the love that a child brings, and is willing to sacrifice personal freedom for such a fulfilling life. Given that you do not know whether and how you may change, you do not know what it will be like for you, the future self, to live out a particular life choice. You then do not know how to make a rational decision.

Along the same lines, a person’s identities, as well as her commitments and projects, may change. A person who currently finds the choice of becoming a parent alienating, as well as violating her sense of self and the things she values, may become a person who feels parenthood completes her and adds value to her life. While it is arguable that identities, commitments, and personal projects are relatively resistant to change, and also that we sometimes do not want them to change,[[10]](#footnote-10) it is undeniable that they sometimes do change. Given that we do not know how they may change, there appears to remain a difficultly for rational decision-making. To put it differently, the robust notion of the self is still subject to the problem that personal transformation poses to rational decision-making, as described by Paul.

I disagree. On my view, the robust notion of the self is not subject to this problem because holding it as subject to this problem implies that when a person deliberates over her life choices, she needs to step outside her identities, as well as her commitments and personal projects, and adopt an abstract or “identity-free” stance to evaluate how her identities, commitments, and projects may change.[[11]](#footnote-11) Only when a person adopts this Archimedean stance can she evaluate this potential change and consider how this potential change affects her decisions.

However, there are reasons to think that one should not be asked to take such a stance when deliberating over one’s choices. One reason is that adopting this stance demands that we deviate from our normal way of deliberating. We typically deliberate from who we are, and reason from our commitments and personal projects. Another reason is that this demand risks alienating a person “in a real sense from his actions and the source of his action in his own convictions,” thereby making his decision-making inauthentic (Williams 1973, 116). As Bernard Williams suggests, demanding someone to take an identity-free stance in deliberation is “to neglect the extent to which his actions and his decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which his is most closely identified” (1973, 116). It constitutes “an attack on his integrity” (117).[[12]](#footnote-12) This result poses a problem for Paul’s view, given how much she emphasizes authenticity in subjective deliberation (2014, Ch. 4).

Nevertheless, highlighting the importance of deliberating from one’s identities and commitments does not mean that one should never attempt to take an identity-free perspective to assess oneself and one’s options. Striving for such a perspective is an important capacity that human beings have, so a view that dismisses the role of such a capacity in subjective deliberation would go too far. Highlighting this way of deliberation, then, only means that the consideration of personal transformation from an identity-free perspective does not put an obstacle in the way of rational decision-making. Such consideration may nevertheless have a role of helping us be less obsessed with our commitments, more flexible with our projects, and be mentally prepared for any unpredictable change. In other words, we decide rationally by choosing whichever conforms our commitments and projects, and then we carry out our decisions with a sufficiently-prepared, open-mined attitude toward the unpredictability of future.

Admittedly, sometimes we may not know what we are committed to and which project we want to devote ourselves to, as previously discussed. Other times, we may appear to have conflicts in our different commitments and projects. It is at times like these that we are overwhelmed by the transformative nature of life choices to the extent that we are unsure how to choose. Consideration of times like this, I think, points us to the real reason why life choices sometimes prevent us from rational decision-making. *Contra* Paul’s view, the reason does not lie in the personal and epistemic transformation of transformative choices, namely, the fact that we do not know what it will be like for us to have certain transformative experiences. Instead, the real reason lies in our uncertainty about our commitments and personal projects, or in the apparent conflict between our different commitments and projects.

Given that our uncertainty is grounded in our identities, commitments, and projects, a proper solution to the difficulty in decision-making over life choices is to reflect on the reasons why we are unsure about our commitments and projects, or to examine the contributory factors to the seeming conflict, rather than to choose on the basis of revelation. When we do so, we will find that, a lot of times, those reasons and contributing factors have to do with factors in our personal relationships or the society as a whole, but they have little to with the transformative nature of life choices. For example, the reason you are unsure whether you are committed to a life with children may be that you are unsure whether you will be a good parent, and you are unsure about this perhaps because you do not think that you have good role models in your family of origin. What you should do, then, is perhaps trying to reconcile with your family of origin rather than choosing to discover what the experience of having children will be like.

While Paul may not deny the importance of this reflective work—she may hold that this reflective work is simply something that needs to be done before one chooses on the basis of revelation—there is an important line between my view and her view. My view prioritizes the role of identities, commitments, and personal projects in subjective deliberation, and leaves the impact from epistemic and personal transformation on subjective deliberation as secondary. By contrast, Paul’s view prioritizes the impact of epistemic and personal transformation, and pays little attention to the fact that we deliberate from our identities, commitments, and personal projects. I think that these differences make our views incompatible. But for those who doubt this incompatibility, my response is that the different implications on decision-making following from the different emphases my view has are enough for distinguishing my view from Paul’s.

1. **Conclusion**

To sum up, I challenge Paul’s view of transformative choices by arguing three things. First, Paul’s view that epistemic transformation poses a difficulty for rational decision-making not only fails to appreciate the role of identities, commitments, and personal projects, such that we can make a rationally decision by choosing what substantiates or confirms with these things, but it also rests on a notion of the self that is too thin. Second, Paul’s view that personal transformation poses a difficulty for rational decision-making, likewise, rests on a thin notion of the self and fails to respect that our deliberation needs to originate from a perspective embedded within identities, commitments, and personal projects. Finally, *contra* Paul, the real reason that it is difficult to rationally make a life choice does not lie in the transformative nature of life choices, but either in that we are unsure about our commitments or projects, or in that there appears to be a conflict between our different commitments and projects.

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1. This is Paul’s most widely-discussed example (see 2014, 71-94). For media discussions see Lombrozo (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paul states that this characterization of agency is “a cultural notion prevalent in wealthy Western societies” (105, n. 1). However, she does not explain the implication of this as well as how a consideration of other cultural notions may affect her view. Here, I will grant this characterization of agency for the sake of argument though I do have some concerns about this notion. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Exactly how subjective and objective deliberation differ is an interesting topic that is worthy of further discussions. The distinction is nevertheless not the focus of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I avoid examples that are morally significant such as the choice of committing a crime or going to war because moral issues are not the primary concerns in the literature of transformative experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. While it is reasonable to ask about the criterion for counting an experience as “dramatically new,” I will not dig into this question here. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Here, some may suggest the reasoning lacks nuance. Even though one does not have similar first-personal past experiences, one may still invoke relevant second- or third-personal information to imagine the choice. Here, Paul’s claim is that second or third personal information is in general insufficient for imagining or knowing about one’s first personal experiences. While it is worth exploring whether Paul’s claim is true, especially when it comes to complex lived experiences such as having a child, it is nevertheless beyond the scope of this paper to discuss this question. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I derive this term from some of the free will discussions, such as Kapitan (2011), but use the term for a different purpose of argumentation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Paul, in her later response to McKinnon, interprets McKinnon’s critique differently. Paul suggests that McKinnon’s example of gender transition can be accommodated by her model of choosing on the basis of revelation. As she claims, “McKinnon argues that we need a model for rationally choosing to transition. I agree… you might rationally choose to transition based on the preference to discover yourself with a new gender” (2015a, 511). However, I think that this response misses McKinnon’s point. There is a gap between choosing to transition because there is “an existential need,” as MacKinnon suggests, and choosing to do so because you prefer to “discover yourself with a new gender,” as Paul describes. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Paul 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Barnes (2015) for the idea of “character-planning.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For a similar point see Barnes (2015, 785). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. While Williams makes these claims in the context of disagreeing with utilitarianism, his points can be applied to subjective deliberation in general, whether or not the options one deliberates over are moral ones. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)