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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Eros and Anxiety

Vida Yao[1]

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Abstract
Recent philosophical interest in "transformative experiences" is largely motivated by L. A. Paul's arguments that such experiences challenge our hopes to live up to an ideal 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-realization" that guides Paul's project, and which must be granted in order to motivate the problem purportedly generated by experiences that drastically change what we want and what we know.

Keywords Transformative experience · Eros · Love · Rationality · Authenticity

> Who are you? How many selves have you? And which of those selves do you want to be?
>
> Is Yale College going to educate the self that is in the dark of you, or Harvard College?
>
> The ideal self! Oh, but I have a strange and fugitive self shut out and howling like a wolf or a coyote under the ideal windows. See his own red eyes in the dark? This is the self who is coming into his own.
>
> D. H. Lawrence (1977, p. 15).

1 Introduction

L.A. Paul introduces "transformative experiences" into contemporary philosophical discussion by arguing that they pose a philosophical *problem*: a problem she believes we all face, given the way in which these experiences, by stipulation, change the person who undergoes them, and given the ubiquity of such experiences within any human life. I am skeptical. My skepticism is not with the idea they *can* pose a certain kind

✉ Vida Yao
vidayao@humnet.ucla.edu

[1] Department of Philosophy, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA, USA

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of problem, and that they may pose a version of the problem that Paul contends they do. I do not doubt that many people within philosophy and outside of it are genuinely gripped by it. My skepticism is with the idea that transformative experiences pose or *should* pose this problem for us all—that is, that it is felt or should be felt by us all, even just those of us within the relatively "wealthy", "western", durian-deprived[1] world that Paul addresses.[2]

I will focus on one dimension of the problem Paul put forwards. This is her commitment to the value of *rational mastery* over one's life, and as part of that overall ideal her assumption (shared by many philosophers) that in approaching the most momentous events of our lives we would do best to "proceed as rationally as possible" (Paul, 2014, p. 1). But to grant these starting points is to grant too much. First, we should reconsider whether the experiences that Paul has in mind can really be captured without distortion by the concepts that her assumed model of rational decision and action must assume. Second, we should resist the idea that our lives would simply *be better* or *go better* if only there were a way, after all, to make such decisions in ways that use and express our rational capacities. That idea, though perhaps "intuitive" or resonant with many of us, encourages the suppression of other aspects of our lives and psychologies that, upon reflection, add value and significance to our lives. The fact that certain rationalistic ideals may nonetheless resonate with us may be the result of ideologies we'd best challenge or because—as I'll focus on here—they appeal to certain psychic needs that can be (and should be) managed or developed, or persistently grappled with, rather than satisfied.

I will here develop my suspicion that much of the concern generated by the idea that certain experiences and decisions seem to elude our "rational mastery" is an expression of understandable anxieties which are then exacerbated by the particular rationalistic ideal that Paul assumes and that I will resist. And if, *as philosophers,* we operate with certain underlying assumptions and ambitions which themselves reinforce the dominance of that ideal, we would do better to question our own philosophical assumptions and ambitions. In doing so, we may find ways of acknowledging, respecting, and perhaps coming to embrace and welcome both the wilder and more mysterious aspects of human life that can wither under the scrutiny of rational control, and the wilder and more mysterious parts of ourselves apart from our rational capacities that make such embraces possible.

2 The "Problem" of Transformative Experiences

Begin with the kind of situation that animates contemporary philosophical discussions of transformative experiences. I am faced with a choice where, ideally, I would make the most "rational" decision, understood here as one that will maximize my expected utility. Nobody will force or coerce me to do one thing or the other. Morality is stipulated to be silent on the issue because the options available (for example, becoming

[1] "Imagine that you are in Thailand for the first time, considering whether to have pineapple or durian for breakfast…" (Paul, 2014, p. 35).

[2] As she characterizes the ideal of self-realization that guides her project: "This is a cultural notion prevalent in wealthy Western societies" (Paul, 2014, p. 105).

a doctor, not becoming a doctor; having a child, not having a child) are imagined to be equally morally permissible. The decision I face is one that will dramatically change the course of my life, and so, according to an ideal of personal autonomy, *I* am the only person who should make it, and I should make it by determining what it is that I most deeply or fundamentally want. And to make this decision in an "authentic" way, in Paul's estimation, my choice should reflect those deep concerns while also drawing on my own past experiences. According to this ideal of "self-realization", which Paul characterizes as "romantic", we are to be the rational, autonomous masters of ourselves and our lives (Paul, 2014, p. 112). We want, she contends, not to merely "live through" our futures, but to "control" and "own" them through our rational, authentic choices (Paul, 2014, p. 107).[3]

I do not doubt that this ideal, or something that approximates it, will sound familiar and attractive to Paul's intended audience. Beyond it being manifested in some form as an ideal in "western", liberal, and capitalist cultures,[4] it appeals to those parts of us all that yearn for control, knowledge, rational justification, maximization, efficiency, getting what we want, and a kind of individual freedom. We crave for these characteristics of life, especially when we consider in abstract or, are made to experience more brutely, our vulnerability to the chaos, contingency, and indignities of any human life, embodied as we are and within an imperfect world.[5]

But, Paul argues, a problem for my hope to achieve this ideal of "self-realization" and "rational self-mastery" arises once we propose that the major life event that I am deliberating about is what she calls a "transformative experience". According to Paul, such experiences involve both an "epistemic" and a "personal" transformation: one experiences something so novel that one gains a new kind of knowledge—of "what it is like" to experience it—and a transformation of one's "deep" or "core" preferences. Crucially, Paul contends that one cannot have this kind of knowledge before one undergoes these changes to both what one knows, and to one's preferences. While one might be skeptical that this level or kind of knowledge is a necessary condition of making a choice *rationally*,[6] Paul proposes that the crux of the problem she is characterizing is that one cannot make this choice both rationally and *authentically*, given that authenticity necessitates that one's decision be based on already possessing the kind of knowledge that only the experience itself will yield. The problem becomes more pressing should we take into consideration the apparent ubiquity of transformative experiences within any human life, as contemporary philosophers applying Paul's work have been eager to do. As Paul writes:

[3] Paul (2014, pp. 105–109).

[4] "Before contraceptive devices were widely available, deliberation didn't play the same role. Often, you just ended up having a child. And to the extent you actively chose to have children, often it was because you needed an heir, or needed more hands to work the farm, or whatever. But this is not the contemporary approach. If, as a member of an affluent, contemporary Western culture, you dispense with subjective deliberation and subjective values in today's world, you reject a central tenet of that culture's ordinary way of thinking about the choice." (2014, p. 85). One wonders: and *so what?* In other words, we must take into consideration what speaks in favor of this culture's ordinary way of thinking about the choice.

[5] For further discussion and elaboration, see Nussbaum (1986).

[6] For arguments that there is no distinctive, novel problem raised to decision theory by such experiences see Dougherty et al. (2015). For an argument that the problem is not a problem for an ideal of rationality see Sharadin (2015).

> If we leave things like this, then we should conclude that the ideal of self-realization through choice and control of our subjective futures, understood in terms of knowledgably mapping out and selecting possible futures for ourselves, is a chimera (Paul, 2014, p. 112).

But how distressed should I or any of us be if this ideal isn't a viable one, despite its initial and perhaps persistent allure? And how much energy should philosophers spend attempting to show that the ideal is viable, after all? One reason for skepticism about this ideal, attractive to us within liberal, individualistic societies though it may be, is that it is peculiarly and almost singularly focused on one's *self*—a self who should be "armed" against the world in order to maximize the satisfaction of her preferences independently of the potentially coercive influence of others. The ideal that emerges may strike one not as exactly selfish (which would depend on the content of one's preferences), but nonetheless, *solipsistic*.[7]

Rather than question whether the ideal that drives her project deserves our loyalty, Paul attempts to find a solution she believes satisfies its fundamental concerns and so overcomes the problem that transformative experiences *prima facie* pose for it. I'll first consider her solution to further motivate my sense that we'd best challenge that ideal rather than strive to preserve it.

Paul ultimately argues that there *is* a way to reframe one's thoughts about a transformative decision and so avoid the conclusion that the ideal she has in mind is impossible to achieve. Rather than making one's decision in terms of what the experience will be like, or what one's preferences will be after experiencing it, one should think about one's decision in terms of how much one prefers *revealing* what this novel experience will be like, as well as *revealing* the new preferences one will have, weighing how much one prefers this experiential and preferential revelation against how much one values remaining in one's current epistemic and preferential state. The ability to model one's decision in this way, she argues, preserves one's rationality, and to make one's decision given how much one currently prefers the experience of *revelation* (given one's past experiences of revelation), preserves one's authenticity.

How satisfied should we be with this answer? It is not obvious that it solves the problem by Paul's own lights. Why should my *current* preference for revelation preserve my "authenticity" any more than any of my other current preferences, all of which are, as stipulated, subject to transform given the experience in question? But rather than pressing in this direction, I want to emphasize an aspect of this answer which supports my sense that there is something suspicious about the fundamental values underlying Paul's project, and so, the urgency with which she and others have encouraged us to reflect on the ubiquity of transformative experiences within our lives.

While she does not offer in her book a fully developed conception of "authenticity", we are nonetheless provided with some sense of what is both necessary and sufficient to achieve it, given both her reasons for thinking that transformative choices are *prima*

[7] One might object that this worry is moralistic. When it comes to an individual's life, abstracting away from her "morally relevant decisions" as Paul instructs us to do, it is simply none of our business that an individual view herself and the world this way. That is true. But the criticism that I will mount here is not a *moral* one. Rather, it is seated in a concern that this is not a good ideal for a person to aspire to *for her own sake.* It is an inadequate answer to the more general and classic philosophical question of how one should live one's life, which is the form of question that implicitly shapes Paul's project.

facie problematic for the ideal she has in mind, and given her proposed solution. First, authenticity—according to Paul—necessitates that the decision-maker be acquainted with "what it will be like" to experience what one is deliberating about. Second, it necessitates that a person makes the decision in some way that reflects her present deep or core preferences. These are not just necessary conditions, they are jointly sufficient as well, given that they are both satisfied by the solution Paul proposes to allow for rational, authentic transformative choice after all.

Given this conception of authenticity's fixation on the phenomenological, "what it is like" aspect of experience, and given that one of its necessary and jointly sufficient conditions is just that one makes a decision based on one's present deep preferences where this condition can be satisfied by one's current preference for the revelation of new phenomenology and new preferences, "authenticity" becomes a strikingly decadent and insular concern for a person to uphold as a fundamental value, or have govern her most important life decisions. It is hard to imagine why we would admire, respect, or aspire to be like someone who decided to have her first child or to found the state of Israel (both examples Paul uses), primarily because she wants to see what the experience "will be like", and how it will change her preferences, and "what it will be like" to have these new experiences and preferences revealed to her—and not because, for example, she will bring a new and beloved being into the world or because she feels a deep need to establish a homeland for her people. In other words, we should question whether this conception of authenticity is really a *worthy* ideal, or whether it rings of triviality and self-indulgence: the very criticisms that those who have disparaged the modern ideal of authenticity have voiced.[8] Thus, I began with the suspicion that the ideal that Paul has in mind is one that is peculiarly solipsistic. And in her attempt to preserve that ideal, faced with the problem posed by transformative experiences, she provides a purported solution that only confirms that suspicion.[9]

So, let's begin again, bringing into direct focus the specific values that give rise to the problem in the first place—the idea that the best life for each of us is one in which we are, or strive to become, the rational, autonomous "masters" of our lives in the ways she describes. Strikingly, Paul suggests that according to this ideal, we do

[8] E.g. Trilling (1972) and Bloom (1987). As Charles Taylor (1992) writes,

> The agent seeking significance in life, trying to define him- or herself meaningfully, has to exist in a horizon of important questions. That is what is self-defeating in modes of contemporary culture that concentrate on self-fulfillment in opposition to the demands of society, or nature, which shut out history and the bonds of solidarity. These self-centred "narcissistic" forms are indeed shallow and trivialized; they are "flattened and narrowed," as Bloom says. But this is not because they belong to the culture of authenticity. Rather it is because they fly in the face of its requirements. To shut out demands emanating beyond the self is precisely to suppress the conditions of significance, and hence to court trivialization. To the extent that people are seeking a moral ideal here, this self-immuring is self-stultifying; it destroys the condition in which the ideal can be realized (40).

The alternative conception of authenticity which I will not develop here but will allude to toward the end of my paper, stands in some opposition to Taylor's conception of it as well—but I will consider why it may be for at least one reason less self-stultifying than the one that Paul advances.

[9] This is not to criticize a person's interest in revelation per se. There are plenty of contexts in which it would be a perfectly respectable (and even *likeable*!) motive for a person to have. My skepticism is with the idea that we ought to allow it to have the fundamental role in our lives and in the most important decisions we make in our lives, that Paul suggests. Thank you to Francey Russell for discussion of this point.

not merely aspire to be rational in our decisions, *but as rational as we can possibly be*. Thus, though its details differ from other rationalistic conceptions of how to live a good human life, it follows in that tradition in not just treating rationality as one human good among others, but as one that ought to properly dominate or condition all the others.

I will here put pressure on this conception of the good life in an indirect manner, by discussing in detail one kind of experience that we should all pre-theoretically agree is "transformative". This is the experience of falling and being in love with another human being.[10] As I'll discuss, this kind of experience does not simply pose a potential problem for someone who would hope to make the most rational decision about her life in the way that Paul does once it is framed as a potential option among others to choose from. Given how it characteristically manifests within a person's psyche, the experience of falling in love is in direct conflict with the capacities that constitute and support rational self-mastery, in general. Nonetheless, it does not seem that we would, or should, fail to consider it as one of the most valuable and meaningful experiences within human life. It is far from obvious that it would be *better* for us to lose the psychological dispositions necessary for experiencing it in favor of those that support rational self-mastery, instead.

Apart from being able to illustrate my more general point that the ideal driving Paul's project is a limited personal ethic, there are other reasons why this experience is worth focusing on in the context of engaging with the recent philosophical literature on "transformative experiences", theorized as Paul theorizes them. It will serve to illustrate other aspects of Paul's framework, or the framework she assumes to generate the purported problem, that we should view more skeptically. In particular, to account for the experience of falling and being in love, we must complicate the notions of the self, of desire, and of what a transformative experience consists in, in ways that this framework's simplified conceptions of all three cannot easily accommodate. These observations may encourage us to see the ways in which actual transformative experiences may result in *more* internal conflict, less rational control, and a more serious sense in which a person might be said to have "lost herself" or "become" a "new" or "transformed" person, than Paul—in motivating her book by focusing on the highly artificial case of being, in one swift bite, turned into a vampire—recognizes. But even so, as I will argue, this alone does not necessitate that we ought to feel even *more* anxious about such experiences, in general.

Not only can we agree that falling in love is a transformative experience, it is also not something that one *chooses to do*. While this may seem to make my discussion tangential to Paul's—she is, after all, focused on situations in which we *can* choose to undergo a transformative experience—I will suggest that our overall attitude to

[10] As I'll discuss below, the question of what exactly falling in love does to a person's *self* will depend on further commitments about what a self is, and what love is. The conception of erotic love that I will rely upon below will serve to illustrate how difficult it is to adequately apply Paul's conception of what a "transformative experience" is without further theoretical work about the self. But importantly for my argument here, no matter how we conceptualize it, there will be experiences of falling in love which will yield a version of the change that Paul describes—it will yield new phenomenology that one would be otherwise unfamiliar with, and change one's preferences in a way that they otherwise would not, such that one cannot choose to undergo the experience while also exercising one's rational self-mastery, or achieving the kind of self-realization Paul has in mind.

the fact that love is non-voluntary and non-rational, and partly valuable *because* it is both, may be grounded in an ethical perspective outside of Paul's from which we can re-evaluate its guiding values. This alternative stance allows us to view *all* potentially transformative experiences, including those that we cannot choose to undergo but also those that we can. It will allow us to criticize and perhaps attempt to lessen the domination of the particular rationalistic ideal assumed by Paul, and the anxieties that it may give rise to when we are confronted with persistent and unavoidable aspects of human life.

It is not necessary for my purposes here to endorse a full or unambivalent commitment to the anti-rationalist perspective I will describe. Nor would I do so outside of the aims of this paper. One reason for this is that there is something misleading and even misguided in contrasting these alternatives too sharply, either theoretically or in one's life. It is not as though love, though a passion, cannot have its own reasons or its own justifications, and it is not as though rationality (at least suitably conceptualized) is best understood as fundamentally devoid of passion.[11] A rationalistic conception of rationality latent within philosophy may, along with other factors, encourage us to draw this line sharply and misleadingly, leading us to mischaracterize both sides of it. Nonetheless the "anti-rationalist" perspective I shall describe will serve as useful dialectical counterweight. Once we see and even partially identify with the values of this alternative perspective, our anxiety about transformative experiences—our sense that they pose a serious problem, and for the reasons Paul gives—may fade, or even reconfigure itself as an acceptance and or even celebration of the ways in which such experiences, such as the experience of passionate erotic love, conflict with and undermine our capacities of rational, autonomous self-mastery.

3 Eros and the Self

My discussion of erotic love will rely on observations from philosopher and poet Anne Carson (1998), who investigates why erotic love is commonly described and experienced as "bittersweet"—as simultaneously both pleasant and painful, and marked by both attraction and aversion to the loved person. One explanation of the ambivalent or even contradictory nature of erotic love is that though the lover desires something she does not have, there is built into her overall experience the fear that if she were to get what she wants, she would no longer want it. But the pleasure that one experiences in

[11] *Pace* Frankfurt's (2004) influential, "anti-rationalist" view of love. For comments about what the reasons of love could amount to, without serving as *justifications* which could somehow rationally compel a person's love or the cessation of it, see Moran's (2007) review of Harry Frankfurt's *Reasons of Love*. Moran writes, "Reasons, after all, come in many varieties, and needn't aspire to the form of demonstrative proof. A person can give his reasons for caring, or caring so much, about his work or his family by articulating its sources of satisfaction for him, and by describing the aspects under which it is expressive of other values and commitments, both the general and the irreducibly particular. The role of reasons in this sort of discourse is not that of a proof, let alone an effort to compel one's interlocutor to come to care in the same way about the same things. And conversely, another person's request for reasons in such a case need not be seen as a demand to produce sufficient justification for one's caring, on pain of being rationally required to abandon it, but rather an invitation to articulate and make (more) intelligible the nature and form of one's caring" (468). See, also, (Cavell 1968).

erotic love is one that depends on continuing to want what one does not have—to be and feel unsatisfied—in this intensely pleasurable and painful way.[12]

In experiencing this profound lack of what is longed for (and what may need to be kept at some distance, should that longing be nourished), the self in love—we can imagine for the first time—undergoes certain changes in self-understanding that can themselves constitute dramatic changes to that self. If self-reflective and in good faith, one must acknowledge, in acknowledging this *lack* of another person that is longed for, one's own incompleteness, dependence upon, and vulnerability to that person.[13] And a characteristic way in which one's self-understanding or self-conception will change is that one may also experience a glimpse, as Carson puts it, of the self that one imagines one could be if only this lack were to be satisfied: "When he inhales Eros, there appears within him a sudden vision of a different self, perhaps a better self, compounded of his own being and that of his beloved" (53). This is a familiar enough experience that it gives rise to and makes intelligible and compelling, even to us moderns, Aristophanes' myth of completed and godlike beings, rendered in two halves as punishment for their pride, who then must roam the earth in search of one another to feel complete and godlike again. But to illustrate this aspect of love without this myth, and from a world more familiar to contemporary readers, Carson provides the reflections of Bernard, from Virginia Woolf's *The Waves*, about his love for Neville:

> Something now leaves me; something goes from me to meet that figure who is coming, and assures me that I know him before I see who it is. How curiously one is changed by the addition, even at a distance, of a friend. How useful an office one's friends perform when they recall us. Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but Neville mixed with somebody—with whom?—with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, Who am I? (Carson, 1998, p. 36–37)

Thus, falling in love characteristically involves a transformation, and to experience oneself as transformed in several ways. It is to see oneself as now radically incomplete and imperfect, compared to the relative completeness and perfection attainable if only one were united with the beloved. And it is to incorporate the beloved *into* one's new conception of who one is: to have one's self "adulterated", and "mixed up" with another person. In other words, one may begin to identify with those aspects of oneself that one imagines the loved person may love in return or begin to feel alienated from those aspects that one imagines the beloved person would be averse or indifferent to. And again, one may now desire or hope to become the kind of "better" or richer or deeper self that one has glimpses of, as being the "missing half" of a more complete unity. And all these changes to the self occur before the desires for closeness or

[12] As Nehamas (2007) points out, some, like Schopenhauer, take the "unsatisfiability" of erotic love to be intolerable; others, like Plato (in certain voices), take it to be something to celebrate.

[13] As Carson points out, this is a basic starting point in understanding how, according to Freud, we come to develop a self-conception (as an individual distinct from others) at all. There is a question here of what, in the overall development of a human being, will count as the first time that one is "in love" on that picture; I will put aside those questions and just assume that we have a shared sense of when this is, and that being erotically attached to your parental figure as an infant is not the kind of experience I am talking about.

some form of union with the beloved are satisfied, and even if those desires remain unsatisfied.

I mentioned earlier that *falling* in love is not something that is under a person's control. But keeping these other aspects of the experience of love in mind we can now see several other ways in which this transformative experience undermines our ability to be rational, autonomous, self-controlled "masters" of our lives. Erotic desire, as Carson puts it, splits the mind. One may have difficulty in forming a coherent set of desires, precisely because of the dual nature of love: one wants, and one doesn't want, one may know exactly at one moment what one wants to do, and then not know at all in the next. Hence, one reason why this form of love is characterized as a kind of *madness*.[14]

Not only may the lover experience this complex desire as something that is profoundly outside of her control, she may also experience the changes which eros renders to her self as outside of her control. If she is now helplessly attracted to some image of what *she* could be like, if only her love were returned or her erotic desires consummated, it is not because she has determined, as a matter of reflection and practical reason, that this is the most justifiable ideal for her to strive for, even by her own lights. And one ineliminable aspect of love is that it involves an attachment to and concern for a particular person in a way that is not, in a universalizable or public sense, rationally justifiable. Further, erotic love tends to present the object of one's attractions in ways that are epistemically unjustifiable—the beloved may appear to have qualities that he simply doesn't have, or certain qualities he does have may become, in Stendhal's words, "crystallized" and seen as more central to his identity than they in fact are. Anna Karenina may have her reasons, opaque to her, for loving Vronsky (and for loving the image of herself that she glimpses as the person whom Vronksy loves in return), but their force will be highly particular to *her,* and to *Vronsky,* as object of her love. And of course, all of what she sees in him may be an illusion spurred by her desire for him. And one may experience the new ideal set by one's love as deeply and uncontrollably attractive even if it conflicts badly with one's existing values and concerns. Thus, we can see how love conflicts with certain defining marks of standard views of both practical and epistemic rationality: it introduces incoherence and conflict into both one's preferences and actions, it provides an aspiration that is itself not grounded in a set of autonomously-determined or reflectively endorsed values, it has a tendency to project qualities onto the object of the beloved that may not in fact be there, and it itself is generated in ways that are not rationally justifiable.

We can already note several differences in how Paul characterizes what a "transformative experience" is, and how the transformative experience of being in love transforms the self. First, Paul considers just those cases in which one wonders whether to *satisfy* a certain preference for an experience, the successful satisfaction of which will then render the pertinent transformation to the self. I ask myself: do I want the experience of having a child, or of tasting a new fruit, given the changes that will happen to myself should I undergo this experience? But with erotic love, the desire *itself* is the transformative experience, regardless of whether the desire is satisfied. Second, Paul assumes a standard model of desires which understands them as simple in both

[14] Hence also, Sappho's fragment: "I don't know what to do. I think yes—and then no." (Sappho, 2009).

content, and form—they are attitudes to either have or not have something, and they aim at their own satisfaction. As Carson's discussion suggests, an erotic desire cannot be so simple—it is itself a "splitting" of the mind, and generates within it new desires, all of which seem to conflict with one another, and the fundamental desires that constitute erotic love itself. And it would be too simple to conclude that erotic love aims at its own satisfaction: as we've seen, it seems to commonly include a desire for continued longing for the object that is desired, its pleasure and intensity largely premised on its remaining *unsatisfied*, to some degree. Third, according to Paul, a transformative experience results in a transformation to one's phenomenal knowledge base, and one's preferences. But this too, is too simplistic to characterize all that happens to a person who falls in love. One does one simply undergo a change in one's *preferences,* or a change in "what it is like" to be a person, but also changes in one's *self-conception* or self-understanding—a distinction that Paul leaves unmarked.[15] And this epistemic change is much more than a change to one's phenomenal knowledge base. It's true that before ever falling in love, one might not know "what it is like". But more than this, one is now dependent and vulnerable in a new way; how she conceives of both her current and her "ideal" self will incorporate the self of another, and in that respect her self, self-conception, and the self she may aspire to will become vividly relational, centered around the person whom she loves.[16]

Having described this particular and familiar transformative experience in some detail, we can now consider the higher-order attitudes that one might have toward this experience, and the awareness that one will undergo certain changes, simply in light of being in the grips of erotic love. As Carson notes of Neville, he finds this experience "merely strange." Though he acknowledges the *pain* of having his identity be now "mixed up" with Neville's, "he does not appear to hate the change, nor to relish it" (Carson, 1998, p. 39). But in contrast to Neville, we can imagine another stance: one represented, for Carson, by the Greeks poets, but which should be familiar to us as a modern attitude as well. These poets compare the experience of erotic love to death, but also to "piercing, crushing, bridling, roasting, stinging, biting, grating, cropping, poisoning, singeing and grinding to a powder" (Carson, 1998, p. 40–41). The anxiety

[15] Imagine a person who, late in life, discovers that she is in fact the biological daughter of a man she thought was her uncle, reacting to this discovery with shock, and surprise. She finds that her entire life has to be re-understood: her understanding of the man she thought was her biological father, the man she thought was her uncle, and of course, her mother. The change in how she now *thinks of herself* may be also be accompanied by changes in "what it is like" to be her: perhaps when she looks in the mirror now, or at her children's faces, she no longer sees her father's roman nose, but his brother's; perhaps when she now recollects a favorite childhood memory, she finds she must radically reinterpret the significance of interactions between the man she thought was her uncle and herself: what did all those gifts and phone calls from him really mean, after all? While it is true she has never had the experience of being told that she is somebody else's child, it is not her new knowledge of the phenomenology of this experience (that is, "what it is like" to be told that you are another person's child) that leads to this change in her self-conception. And we can imagine a case like this, transformative of a person's self-conception and her phenomenology, in which her *preferences* do not change. She is no descendent of Oedipus, she just wants her life to go on as it did, as far as is possible, before she learned this surprising fact about herself.

[16] Any human that develops a sense a self at all has a self that is already relational: this general fact about her is not one that changes when she falls in love. Nonetheless, this feature of human life is often be overlooked—perhaps especially by one who is wedded to a certain understanding of individual autonomy. It is enough for my point here that the person in love *experiences, vividly,* her relationality to another person. Thank you to Daniela Dover for raising this question.

expressed by these poets, as Carson points out, is grounded in a concern for personal *integrity*. This is no mere fear that one's *preferences* will change: it is a fear that one will lose, and in ways that one does not have control over, one's self, entirely.

How one will feel about, experience, and evaluate this kind of experience will thus depend heavily on one's self-*conception*. If one is attached to a conception of one's self as overlapping with what one has rational control over (as a rationalist is likely to be), the experience of an emotion like love will itself be alarming; that alarm will turn into anxiety if one has a sense that one *must,* in order to preserve one's integrity (and thereby one's self), retain some coherence and rational order to one's desires and self-understanding. It is from this perspective—on which I closely identify myself with my capacities for rational self-control and autonomy—that such a transformation will seem like, as Carson writes, a "concrete personal threat" (Carson, 1998, pp. 45). Consider, as illustration, how Agnes Callard writes of her own experience of erotic love, which she characterizes in various ways as "monstrous":

> Agathon says Eros is soft and delicate, because he only makes his home in the tender regions of the most soft-hearted people. That doesn't describe me. Nor does it describe Ester [the protagonist of two novels by Lena Andersson]: Andersson paints her as an unusually rational and dispassionate person. What resonates most with me in Andersson's novels is the theme of confusion: to which she returns again and again: "The worst part of all was not understanding this thing she was in the midst of, this thing that had her in its clutches. There is no pain like the pain of not understanding." (Callard, 2022)

Adding to the anxieties that any "unusually rational and dispassionate" person may feel about falling in love are the additional anxieties that come with any kind of dramatic change in one's sense of who one is. Anna knows all else that is at stake as she considers her decision to leave Karenin for Vronsky: the attachments that she had, and the commitments that she made, as the Anna she was before she fell in love. And she knows, too, the risk that the life which she hopes for is not one that she, or Vronsky, may be able to have much control in shaping. Their attempt at making a life together fails disastrously—for reasons external to both who she is and who Vronsky is, but for reasons too, that are not apparent to either of them, about who they in fact are when they are with one another, before they attempt to make their life together. Again, there remains the possibility that in their love for one another, they simply didn't *see* one another clearly. They surely couldn't know all there would be to know to be fully justified in thinking that their life together would work out for the best—that they could *make* it work out for the best—after all. She thus makes her decision without this knowledge, and her decision is one of faith, trust, and the *hubris* of erotic love itself—not one of maximally rational justification.[17]

[17] This does not mean that it isn't possible for Anna's decision to be one that is justifiable, as if her decision at the time, though not maximally rationally justified is somehow *irrational.* It turned out to be one that she could not ultimately think of as justified—but as Williams (1981) argues in "Moral Luck", that is because of how things *turned out,* and not how things stood at the time of her decision.

4 The Anxieties of Reason, the Confidence of Love

Certain readers of Anna's end might conclude: and that's just what happens when you allow such passions to control you and motivate your major life-decisions without sufficient epistemic and practical justification. No wonder we strive for the possibility of self-control, autonomy, and the tools of rational decision-making instead. Not only are we trying to live the "best" life possible by our own lights, we must also try the best we can to save ourselves from utter ruin.

Before we simply agree with this imaginary, more restrained reader, let's turn back to the ideal described by Paul, which may also encourage this assessment of Anna's decision and her life. How is one to deliberate about the kind of transformation she underwent, and that all others who fall in love may undergo, and which may lead them to act in ways that seem to clearly conflict with what would be in their best interest, and which could easily lead to personal disaster? As I've suggested, it is unusual—highly unusual—to think of falling in love as something that one could have a *choice* about. One is *struck* by love, one *falls* in love; if one is *trying to decide* whether to fall in love with a particular person, the question is probably already closed. But of course, a philosopher might suggest that we abstract from the realities, just in the way that Paul does. We cannot of course choose to become vampires either, but let's pretend. Barring conceptual objections that one might raise to the possibility, let's suppose there were a pill, powder, or potion that could render one vulnerable to erotic love. Should I take the pill? How can I make this decision in a way that is maximally *rational, autonomous,* and *authentic* to the person I currently am*?*

Rather than answering that question directly, I want to consider the anxiety that may lie behind asking it in earnest—an anxiety shared by the Greek poets that Carson describes, and which Callard expresses as well. Assuming one aspires to Paul's ideal, we can see how this question might be experienced as a live and troubling one, while also gaining some sense of the content of these troubles. Again, Paul imagines a life in which an individual has, ideally, as much knowledge she can have before she makes a life-changing decision. And she is motivated to maximize the goodness she can get out of life by satisfying her current preferences, where in order to do so, she must have knowledge about what will do that most effectively. But again, without having yet experienced what she is deliberating about, she is barred from having that knowledge, nor will she have the knowledge of what shape her preferences will take after she undergoes this experience. This is, according to Paul, a threat to her ability to live as not only an autonomous being, who makes decisions based on her current desires, but one that can remain "authentic" to who she is in a way that references those current desires, and who can "own" her decisions in the way that rational justification may allow. No wonder then, the worry she may feel when asking herself whether to fall in love, or whether to undergo *any* of the ubiquitous experiences within a human life that may upend her current self. No wonder then that she might try—as Paul does—to preserve some ability to make this decision in a more rational manner.

Contrast this ideal with what happens to a person who is already in love. Her desires have drastically changed in their content and in their force. Because of the bifurcated nature of love, she will have desires that are inherently inconsistent with one another. Because this is love of another person, she may not be able to simply *decide,* based on

what *she wants* (if she can even arrive at a determinate answer here)—what she wants will depend on what another person, beyond her control, wants. And perhaps even more troubling, her sense of herself will become "adulterated" with another person—to the extent that she may not even be able to coherently think of herself as independent of this person. Again, her self and self-conception become vividly relational. Her love is something that she may not experience as integrated with the rest of herself, in such a way that it may feel *external* to who she is and what she wants (or thought she wanted) before this happened to her. And she is made *vulnerable* by her love: she simply cannot, through reason and her self-control, decide how it would be best for her life to go; this too will depend on someone else who exists beyond her control. In contrast, Paul's ideal life may attract us precisely because of how much knowledge and control one is imagined to have or will strive to have. In general, we do not want and often fear being *passive* in the face of the world, victimized by its contingencies, pains, humiliations, and evils. But being in love, one simply lacks this kind of control and the invulnerability it can seem to promise, from at least some of those sufferings. One is rendered in certain crucial ways passive to both the experience itself and to another person, leaving oneself wide open to them.

But even granting all this it is not clear that one must, or should, have the attitude toward the experience of love that the Greek poets may have had, and that we, in hoping to become rational masters of our lives, might have toward this kind of experience as well. One may be anxious about such changes, of course. One may even come to hate them for the personal concrete threat they seem to pose should one be, as Callard reports of herself, heavily identified with her rational capacities, and unusually "dispassionate". But equally, one might at the very same time relish in the loss of autonomy, self, rational deliberation, and self-control. One might insist, as the Socrates of Plato's *Phaedrus* comes to realize after leaving the rational order of the city, being in the presence of a beautiful man, and in the grips of intimate philosophical conversation, that Eros is no *monster,* but a *divine* form of madness.[18]

Why is this? First, one might not have initially identified so strongly with the capacities of rational mastery that Paul has in mind; indeed, one might conceive of herself as more closely tied to, or more fundamentally constituted by her emotions and passions, in the first place. From this perspective, then, she might view the kind of transformation that happens in love as not exactly a *loss* of herself, but a further *development* and *manifestation* of her "truer" or "deeper" self, in some sense always there but currently undeveloped and unknown. Hence, D.H. Lawrence's sense that the "howling coyote" of his self—strange and fugitive to him as he is now—is a self that would "come into his own", should it be allowed to express itself in his life without the domesticating securities and restraints of reason.[19]

[18] This reading of *Phaedrus* is defended by Nussbaum (1986).

[19] As Carson writes, Nietzsche (in certain voices) seems to relish all the ways in which love transforms us, in ways outside of rationality and control, where he implicitly assumes that it is a real or truer self that emerges from the experience of erotic love: "… 'One seems to oneself transfigured, stronger, richer, more complete; one is more complete.… It is not merely that it changes the feeling of values; the lover is worth more' (Nietzsche, 1976 , p. 426). It is not uncommon in love to experience this heightened sense of one's own personality ('I am more myself than ever before!' the lover feels) and to rejoice in it, as Nietzsche does" (Carson, 1998, p. 63).

But for those who may not be so uninhibited, whose self-conceptions are not so robust and untamed as Lawrence's, there are other considerations to take in mind when considering the overall disposition to be at least *open* to such experiences. Psychologists have commented on the psychological harms of developing and maintaining a personality that is too attached to rational mastery for its own sake, and too attached to the securities that rationality can psychologically provide. Arguably, one explanation for John Stuart Mill's breakdown in early adulthood was an *overemphasis* on the development of his rational capacities, to the neglect of his emotional and passionate ones. It was, after all, not the intellectual grasp of a convincing reason that saved him from his despair, but the development and exercise of his emotional, passionate, and bodily attachment to *poetry.*[20] There is something behind the familiar thought that without the development of these non-rational aspects of one's self, what is at risk is not one's *life,* but one's *soul.* And there also looms the worry that should one be especially attached to her capacities of rationality and so neglect the development of her non-rational ones, she will not be able to sustain a personal connection with her own emotions and passions, and may even come to fear or be ashamed of them. This may result in an inability or unwillingness to feel and understand them, and insofar as she *is* in fact an emotional and passionate creature (restrained though she may currently be), she will to that extent be unable to understand *herself,* what she "really" or truly wants, and why she acts in the ways she does.

We might propose, further, that it is positively good for a human being, more generally, to be able to develop and exercise to some extent all of her essentially human capacities—and perhaps deeply important that she be able to exercise those constituted by her emotions, and her passions. And it is a good thing that human beings fall in love with one another, or be able to, even if, and partly because, it is a kind of "madness". One's personality, and one's life, are enriched by eros; human life would be unimaginable without it. More specifically, there is a kind of spontaneous receptivity and sensitivity to the world outside of oneself that is made available to a person should she be able to let down her rational and deliberative guard. This is the kind of receptivity that one experiences when engaging with the world erotically, rather than rationally, or as Paul puts it, "smartly". One benefit of approaching the world in this way is that there are certain forms of intimacy—with people, but with other objects of erotic engagement—that may simply be unavailable to those who are temperamentally unable to, or who have not experienced it. Martha Nussbaum, Lawrence and Audre Lorde put forward in various ways the idea that without being able to risk the kind of passionate, emotional and bodily engagement and vulnerability required by erotic engagement, a personality will become inhibited and stifled in ways that will have implications well beyond one's love or sex life, narrowly construed. As Nussbaum writes:

> In people of good nature and training, the sensual and appetitive response [of erotic love] is linked with, and arouses, complicated emotions of fear, awe, and respect, which themselves develop and educate the personality as a whole, making it both more discriminating and more receptive (Nussbaum, 1986, p. 214).

[20] (Mill, 1960).

As Lorde writes, these responses must be developed and exercised in order to become a self that can be erotically engaged with another in all sorts of activities that have nothing to do with sex: "…sharing joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis of understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their distance" (Lorde, 1984, p. 56). And this point can then be extended to activities that don't involve another person, at all. As she elaborates, the exercise of one's erotic capacities is what allows for an "open and fearless underlining of [one's] capacity for joy," (Lorde, 1984, p. 57) and expresses itself, for her, "…in the way my body stretches to music and opens in response, hearkening to its deepest rhythms, so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea" (Lorde, 1984, pp. 56–57). To achieve certain forms of intimacy with a person is, typically, to allow that person to shape one's self-conception in ways that one cannot fully predict and does not have ultimate control over. Intimacy with something that is not a person—a poem, a painting, a piece of philosophy—typically involves the same openness and receptivity: the same willingness to be affected, perhaps deeply, by something outside of oneself, in ways that one cannot fully predict or control. It involves allowing oneself *to be moved* and *to be changed* by something outside of oneself, not to mine it for pleasure or knowledge some other benefit that one has a determinate sense of before being so moved and changed. As Annie Ernaux writes of the man she had a passionate affair with who : "Whether or not he was 'worth it' is of no consequence… thanks to him, I was able to approach the frontier separating me from others, to the extent of actually believing that I could sometimes cross over it… Without knowing it, *he brought me closer to the world*" (Ernaux, 2003, pp. 59–60, my emphasis).

5 Conclusion

I've characterized a transformative experience that does not fit, at least without severe distortion, into the psychological model that Paul uses, given her conception of what desire, the self, and personal transformation consist in. At the same time, I've also illuminated several aspects of the experience of falling and being in love that conflict directly and deeply with the values that underlie Paul's overall project. But as I've also suggested, it seems possible for a person not to experience *those* aspects in a wholly negative or anxious way: it is possible to positively *want* to undergo a loss or suspension of the ideals of personal life that Paul has in mind. One may simply want to lose control, to be moved about in the world by forces that seem outside of oneself, to come to understand oneself in relation to another particular person (or other object of erotic or passionate attachment), to be unsure of where one ends and begins, to be unable to find rational justification for why one wants to do what one wants to do. Thus, it's *not* obvious that all of us do, in fact, approach our lives and even our biggest decisions with a hope to "proceed as rationally as possible", or that we are all concerned with choosing the "smartest option", the "option that would make [one's] life as good as it could be" (Paul, 2014, p. 1). And it is not *at all* obvious that we're mistaken in this.

Am I suggesting that it would be good for a person to pursue a life in which one's rational capacities are left to wither? For a person to not, as far as is possible, deliberate rationally about important decisions in her life, to not gain knowledge about the likely outcomes, or to not develop a sense of self that is autonomous and somewhat independent of those that she is close to, or erotically attached to? I hope it's clear that this is not what I am advocating. While I've warned of the risks of a life dominated by rationality, there are—obviously—inherent and extrinsic risks to leading a life dominated by passion, as well.

What I am suggesting, however, is that when we imagine the lives of those who may have attempted to embrace this side of human personality to the fullest—Lawrence, and the capital-R Romantic poets,[21] for example—we are from there able to gain at least some critical distance from the rationalism that informs Paul's work, and which can often come to dominate our own lives.[22] When rationalistic ideals do come to dominate our lives, is easy to see how we can become convinced by the story that Paul has given us: that transformative experiences will be and *should* be for us all, a source of anxiety, giving rise to a problem that must be solved. But by coming to sympathize more with love, and passion more generally, we may find ourselves realizing—as Plato's Socrates did—that that story isn't true.[23]

Philosophers, who may conceive of themselves as the ultimate supplicants of rationality and justification, and whose own self-conceptions are typically especially tied to their sense of themselves as reasonable, self-controlled, and dispassionate people, may be especially liable to this tunnel vision.[24] Even if they allow that the kind of passionate life which Lawrence likens to a "dark forest" has its goods and pleasures, they may find themselves striving to fit its distinctive values within what is otherwise a

[21] Lawrence, of course, died relatively young and with ruined relationships at his back. So did Lord Byron, and so did Percy Bysshe Shelley. Each lived lives that could not be well-suited, not only to the constraints of instrumental reason, but the constraints of morality as well. Nonetheless, there is a perspective from which we can still *admire* the kind of lives they led—even if we might, given some critical distance, not aspire to be like them or be unable to bear the risks and consequences of doing so.

[22] For those of us who feel caught between them—who can not only see, but feel, the allures and risks of both—there is another lesson we might glean once we can keep them both in perspective, given a striking similarity they share. Despite their differences both, we might think, endorse the idea that one's desires, or one's passions, are to be *satisfied*. But if we return to Carson's discussion of love, we may entertain another thought—one that refuses both the satisfaction of practical rationality, and the satisfaction of passion. One might strive to remain in a certain state of *dissatisfaction*—to leave some space in one's life for not of getting what one wants, either because reason or eros declares it, or because the world has made satisfaction impossible—if only to keep those desires, and passions alive.

[23] As Socrates recites, in order to purify himself after speaking falsely about Eros: "There is no truth to that story/You never sailed that lovely ship/ You never reached the tower of Troy." (Plato, 1952).

[24] Importantly, there are various forms of rationalism in philosophical ethics, and I have not said enough here to dissuade those who would want to preserve the idea that some form of rationality is deeply, fundamentally, or inescapably important (perhaps as a conceptual constraint) to living a good human life or being a human agent, at all. Nonetheless, I think that it is a benefit of Paul's position that it characterizes many different ways in which a need for rational self-control can express itself, which are sometimes expressed (though not explicitly) by alternative rationalistic outlooks. There are connections which would be forged between the arguments I present here against her more explicit articulation, and those tendencies within philosophical thought—but I will leave those connections unstated.

well-ordered and rational life plan.[25] By all means fall in love with a person or a tract of land or a piece of music, this *moderately* rationalist and reasonable philosopher might think, but still try your best to do so as part of an overall rational plan of life. Maybe don't do so when you are too young, but equally don't wait until it's too late; allow it to inform and color your major life decisions, but don't let it interfere with all of them; be more moderate and careful in how you feel and how you act, given the risks of immoderation and recklessness.

I confess, as a matter of personal temperament, most sympathy for (or at least, ability to bear the results of) this moderate position. But as philosophers it's important to see that a more passionate perspective may still buck against this reasonable proposal, even if it does not *refute* it because, true to form, it does not aspire to rational refutation.[26] As Cora Diamond writes of an imagined Rawlsian, attempting to fit the value of Lawrentian spontaneity into such a plan:

> Lawrence's image for what Rawls calls a life-plan is a garden-plan for one's soul. And there could, within one's garden-plan, be a space for a certain amount of wilderness, a place where things do not grow in accordance with a plan, but spring up on their own. But a planned garden, even with some space to allocated wilderness, is an altogether different conception from a 'dark forest', an 'Hercynian Wood'. Seeing one's soul as a vast forest is not merely *enlarging* the space in the garden allotted by the gardener-planner to letting things go wild. (Diamond, 1997, p. 226)

A different moderate philosophical temperament that I am skeptical of might balk at this response and demand further rational adjudication between these two conceptions of the good life. Wouldn't it be *better* to find a systematic, higher-order way to balance these ways of life, so that one may most efficiently and effectively draw from the values of both? But to the extent that we can sympathetically imagine a life from *within* the dark wood, we may, like Lawrence, simply refuse the suggestion that it would simply be better to strike an overall, more *rational* balance of these two sides of human life and instead be satisfied even if—again—this refusal is not itself backed

[25] A decision-theorist might, for example, note that it can be rational to "explore" rather than "exploit" the world, especially if in order to more clearly determine what one's preferences are, one must explore the world first. My point is not that this isn't an answer one *could* give. The point is, rather: why would we be in *need* of this kind of answer?

[26] As Cora Diamond notes, in Lawrence's response to Benjamin Franklin he engages in a manner that bears the marks of rational engagement. However his remarks are a form of mockery, and this is crucial to understanding his position: "We can try to read Lawrence as recommending a certain style of rational life-plan… but the mockery is essential to his aim: if we see him as providing a rational life-plan, we fail to see the distance between his conception of life, of responsibility, of agency, and that of Rawls" (Diamond, 1997, p. 226). Consider, also, Foucault's remarks about Nietzsche, who (as noted earlier) represents a philosopher who in places positively endorses the life of passion, a lack of self-control and transformation: "…in relation to [rationalist] philosophy, Nietzsche has all the roughness, the rusticity of the outsider, of the peasant from the mountains, that allows him, with a shrug of the shoulders and without in seeming in any way ridiculous, to say with a strength that one cannot ignore: "Come on, all that is rubbish"… Ridding oneself of philosophy necessarily implies a similar lack of deference. You will not get out of it by staying within philosophy, by refining it as much as you can, by circumventing it with one's own discourse. No. It is by opposing it with a sort of astonished, joyful stupidity, a sort of uncomprehending burst of laughter, which in the end, understands, or in any case, shatters. Yes… it shatters rather than understands" (Foucault, 1988, p. 312).

by a sufficiently rational justification that could compel agreement. The conflict goes on, as it has throughout the history of western philosophy. But importantly, we do not need to *resolve* that dispute for me to make my point here.[27] Once we take into consideration the critical perspective that this alternative, non-rationalistic outlook on life provides, we can now return to the question of transformative experiences and re-consider the question I began with: *just how distressed should we be by them?* And for philosophers: how much energy should we devote to figuring out a way to preserve our ability to apply procedures of rational action and choice to those aspects of human life where such tools seem either descriptively or evaluatively inadequate, or both?

The answer I've offered is: just to the extent that we should value the rationalistic ideal of self-realization Paul describes, and to the extent that we should internalize those values and develop selves that exemplify them.[28] Should we relinquish some of our attractions to rational mastery and control because we remind ourselves of both the damages that such an ideal may render to a person, but also the meaningful

[27] If one wonders about the theoretical implications of what I am suggesting here, it may be helpful to reconsider Wolf's (1982) insistence that we do not collapse the standpoint of personal perfection with either the standpoint of morality or of egoism, nor attempt to find some meta-theoretical way to systematically order our allegiances to all three. The standpoints Wolf is considering here differ from those that I am, but the general philosophical, somewhat anti-theoretical point remains:

> The philosophical temperament will naturally incline, at this point, toward asking, "What, then, is at the top – or, if there is no top, how are we to decide when and how much to be moral?" In other words, there is a temptation to seek a metamoral – though not, in the standard sense, metaethical – theory that will give us principles, or, at least, informal directives on the basis of which we can develop and evaluate more comprehensive personal ideals… I am pessimistic, however, about the chances of such a theory to yield substantial and satisfying results… This suggests that, at some point, both in our philosophizing and in our lives, we must be willing to raise normative questions from a perspective that is unattached to a commitment to any particular well-ordered system of values. It must be admitted that, in doing so, we run the risk of finding normative answers that diverge from the answers given by whatever moral theory one accepts. This, I take it, is the grain of truth in G. E. Moore's "open question" argument. In the background of this paper, then, there lurks a commitment to what seems to me to be a healthy form of intuitionism. It is a form of intuitionism which is not intended to take the place of more rigorous, systematically developed, moral theories – rather, it is intended to put these more rigorous and systematic moral theories in their place. (Wolf, 1982, p. 439).

[28] A reviewer wonders: perhaps the legitimate philosophical worry about transformative experiences is not that they conflict with a set of ideals assumed by Paul, but that they leave us so in the dark that we are unable to make a meaningful choice *at all.* One might as well flip a coin in such circumstances, but this seems like no way at all to reach a decision about having a child or re-starting one's life as an artist or uprooting and emigrating to a new country. This might be right, both about the problem such experiences can actually pose, and about the importance of not simply *picking* an option when the stakes are so high. But there are important (and underexplored differences) between flipping a coin and relying on other *non-rational* deliberative aids or practices that even (otherwise) very rational people will sometimes, out of desperation, rely upon to reach a decision about what to do – such as having a compelling dream, getting a tarot-card reading, consulting a psychic or one's horoscope, flipping open the *I Ching,* or seeing a "sign". I think everyone would agree that using these aids, in general, are not aids to *rationally-informed* decision. I think it is much less obvious that there is anything generally objectionable about a person's use of them when practical reason runs out or would be inappropriate to exercise, and it is worth considering why they are less objectionable than simply flipping a coin in those very contexts. But to fully develop this answer would involve interpreting what exactly is going on in the use of such aids and why they differ in significance from flipping a coin, which I will leave for further work.

pleasures and intensities, deep intimacies with and attachments to the world that we may experience when we are able to be erotically open to them, we may arrive at an alternative approach to the questions that transformative experiences may give rise to, altogether.

This perspective does not seek to provide a generalizable answer to the questions, would it be *rational* for me to leave with Vronsky, pack my bags for Taos or Tahiti, have a child or—again, somewhat ridiculously—fall in love? Rather, it suggests a shift in perspective to one which does not take this to be the most central and relevant practical question posed by such experiences, and it encourages us to *accept* rather than try to ameliorate the very basic fact that there are times in human life where practical reason simply cannot or should not be exercised. From this perspective, we can better appreciate the attractiveness of a life of discovery and risk; we might better understand and even admire a person who can, without maximal or foundational rational justification, trust her intuitions and passions though they may lead to a world, and a self, that is currently unknown and unknowable to her. Though there may be less rationality, less self-mastery, and less control exhibited by such a person, there are forms of authenticity, freedom and self-realization available her, as well.[29] But they will be of their non-rationalistic forms—those expressed by a person who can confidently forge on into wilderness of both the world and herself without the security, and shackles, of reason at her back.[30]

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[29] For a defense of a notion of authenticity that is neither over-rationalized nor over-moralized, and which seems to be worth aspiring to precisely because it's neither, see Benjamin Bagley's manuscript on non-rationalistic authenticity.

[30] As Williams (1972) writes, taking himself to paraphrase Lawrence, "The notion that there *is* something that is one's deepest impulse, that there is a discovery to be made here, rather than a decision; and the notion that one trusts what is so discovered, although unclear where it will lead—these, rather, are the point. The combination—of discovery, trust and risk—are central to this sort of [Romantic] outlook, as of course they are to the state of being in love," (Williams, 1972, p. 79). Given the set of concerns that initially motivated my critique, one might wonder: is *this* conception of authenticity *also* peculiarly and objectionably focused on the self in an ultimately self-stultifying way? For those who bring into consideration the importance of *moral constraints* on authenticity (for example, Taylor), it may seem so. Nonetheless, I think that it is important that the passions that this person is imagined to follow are passions focused and fixated on *objects, activities, and people in the world*. It's true that Lawrence was not a morally good, or perhaps even decent person. But at the same time, he was not particularly or even at all concerned with maximizing his personal benefit or his *happiness*—he followed his passions where they drew him: to Frida, to Taos, to literature.

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