

## Citation Info

When citing this text, please refer to the original publication:

Compaijen, Rob, 2018, "Transformative Choice, Practical Reasons and Trust," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 26/2, pp. 275-292.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09672559.2018.1450084>

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## Transformative Choice, Practical Reasons and Trust

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### 1. Introduction

Can one have reason to choose to become a parent for the first time? To choose to get married? To engage in a religious conversion? Although our immediate answer might be 'of course', such questions are less trivial than they appear. Not only because it is a notorious philosophical problem when I can be said to have a reason for action, but also – and even *more* so – because the kinds of decisions I have mentioned present us with a special kind of difficulty. The difficulty I am hinting at has been brought forward by L.A. Paul in her influential *Transformative Experience* (2014). During our lives, we will find ourselves facing major decisions which have a transformative nature: they open up radically new experiences for us and might even change who we are and what we deem important in life. The fact that they are transformative has important consequences for how we deliberate about them, since deliberation typically involves thinking through different courses of action as well as imagining whether and how they might satisfy our desires. As will become clear, these features are problematized in transformative choices. Since establishing what one has reason to do involves deliberation, it is evident that transformative choices present a special difficulty with regard to having a reason to make such choices. The problem I will be concerned with in this article, then, is whether we can have reason to make a transformative choice.

One way to respond to this problem is by biting the bullet, that is: to accept that our account of practical reasons only goes so far and that one cannot have reason to have one's first child (this will be my primary example in this article), to marry, to engage in religious conversion, and so forth. Yet, I think it would be unfortunate if our account of practical reasons is unable to adequately respond to these existentially pertinent decisions. Indeed, when we find ourselves on

such critical junctions, we at least sometimes experience the sheer significance of the decision as pressing us towards the conviction that we have reason to transform our lives.

In this article I aim to argue that (reasonable) trust is crucial to understand that and when we *can* have reason to make a transformative choice. My argument will develop in three steps. *First* (section 2), I will bring forward an answer to the question of what it means to have a reason for action. *Second* (section 3), I will discuss Paul's views on transformative choice, showing in what respect transformative choices are a problem. I will argue that, although the problem she brings to the fore is a genuine problem, Paul exaggerates the profundity of the problem transformative choices present us with. *Third* (section 4), I will turn to a philosophical discussion of trust and argue that, when one's trust is warranted, one has reason to make a transformative choice.

## **2. Internalism about practical reasons and ideal deliberation**

Doing justice to the particularity of the agent is an important concern for ethical thought. If it is not able to do justice to the fact that the agent is a particular person with particular abilities, concerns, desires, and so forth, it runs the risk of demanding the unreasonable of her (Wiland 2012, 37). Bernard Williams (1981a) compellingly argues that when there is a conflict between an agent's ground projects (projects which give a deep sense of meaning to the agent's existence) and the demands of morality, it is unreasonable to demand of the agent to sacrifice her ground projects. Doing justice to the particularity of the agent is also very important with regard to our problem of transformative choice. Paul (2014, 126-127) provides us with two reasons why: one practical and one principled. The practical reason is that, although 'we could turn our personal decision over to the experts [...] for the sorts of big life choices I've been focusing on, we don't have sufficiently detailed data to do this, and it's not clear we ever will' (Paul 2014, 127). The principled reason is related to the fact that *I* face a transformative choice that is about *my* future. Paul writes: 'It is natural to think of our point of view and our subjective perspective on the future as a defining feature of why we are, where we have control and authority over who we are by making choices that determine what our futures will be like' (Paul 2014, 127).

An account of what it means to have a reason for action should echo these concerns as well. However, what, exactly, does it mean to have a reason to perform an action? Answering this question is notoriously difficult and a truly elaborate answer requires much more space than I have here. In what follows I will outline my account of practical reasons, relating and distinguishing it from some influential accounts of the topic. Phrasing it in a succinct way, I think we should say that A has a reason to  $\Phi$  only if she could reach the conclusion to  $\Phi$  by

deliberating to the best of her ability from the motivations she already has (where ‘A’ refers to an agent, and ‘Φ’ to an action). Let me elaborate this phrase in two steps.

*First*, on this account an agent’s reasons are related to what she is (already) motivated to do. Following Williams, I understand the concept of ‘motivation’ broadly; it entails ‘such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent’ (Williams 1981b, 105). This is, then, an ‘internalist’ understanding of reasons for action, because it argues that the source of an agent’s reasons is ‘internal’ to that agent. In emphasizing that the agent’s reasons are necessarily related to her motivations this account is in line with influential internalist accounts such as those brought forward by Michael Smith (1994; 2004a) and Bernard Williams (1981b; 1995a; 2001). Below I will make clear that my account differs from theirs in an important respect. Before doing so, however, I want to make clear why I believe we should prefer an internalist view over externalist accounts. Externalism typically denies that an agent’s reasons are necessarily related to her motivations. In so doing, they are vulnerable to two forceful objections. The *first* objection is grounded in what is usually referred to as a ‘Humean theory of motivation’ (Smith 1987), which is the idea that the agent’s desires are necessary and her beliefs are not sufficient to explain her being motivated to act. Williams (1981b) uses this theory to argue that externalist views of practical reasons, by denying a necessary connection between an agent’s reasons and her desires, are unable to explain her acting for a reason. The *second* objection is that, by severing the connection between the agent’s reasons and her motivations, externalism is not capable of making clear why these supposed reasons are *my* reasons. That is, externalist accounts are unable to do justice to the particularity of agents. The presupposition on the part of the internalist is, of course, that the agent’s particularity is fundamentally determined by her motivations (understood broadly).

The externalist rejection of the idea that reasons must be potentially motivating is not the only alternative to reasons internalism as I advocate it here. There is also the view, defended by, for example, Jonathan Dancy (2000) and John McDowell (1995), that reasons must be potentially motivating although they are not grounded in the agent’s motivations. Dancy (2000) argues that reasons are not (grounded in) psychological states of the agent, but objective states of affairs. McDowell writes that reasons are grounded in proper ‘ethical upbringing in a roughly Aristotelian way’ (1995, 73), which means, more concretely, that we have reason to do what the *phronimos* – someone who has been brought up properly – would do in our circumstances. I do not have the space to carefully discuss and evaluate these important alternative views here, but I do want to mention a worry. What accounts such as these, which claim that reasons are (grounded in a

source) outside of the agent, seem to establish is that, as Williams puts it, ‘in circumstances X, there is reason to  $\Phi$ ’ (1995b, 190). This seems to entail the idea that *any* agent A has reason to  $\Phi$  in circumstances X. That is, such accounts, too, run the risk of becoming impersonal and (thereby) making unreasonable demands of the agent.

*Second*, as with most internalist conceptions of practical reasons, my account does not directly relate the agent’s reasons to her motivations. It adds a constraint that we can formulate roughly as saying that the agent’s reasons depend upon what she would be motivated to do if she deliberated to the best of her ability. This constraint, which I will draw out below, distinguishes my account from two main internalist positions.

On the one hand there is the model that Williams (1981b) describes as ‘sub-Humean’. The sub-Humean model immediately relates an agent’s reasons to her desires. For example, I have a reason to play football if I desire to stay in shape, and I believe that this desire is satisfied in playing football. This account, then, is not at all concerned with the rationality of the agent’s beliefs. In so doing it leads to deeply counter-intuitive ideas, as Williams (1981b, 102) makes clear by deploying his famous gin-tonic example. If you desire to drink a gin-tonic and you believe that the fluid in front of you is gin, whereas it is actually petrol, do you have a reason to mix the petrol with tonic and drink it? By not being concerned with the rationality of the agent’s beliefs, the sub-Humean model answers unconditionally ‘yes’. That is indeed counterintuitive.

On the other hand there are internalist accounts such as Williams’ and Smith’s which entail a radically idealized understanding of deliberation precisely because they want to make impossible such counterintuitive conclusions. Having a reason to perform some action, for Williams, is dependent on having ‘correct information’ and ‘getting the facts right’ (1995a, 37). Consequently, ascribing practical reasons to agents may involve ‘correcting any errors of fact and reasoning involved in the agent’s view of the matter’ (1995a, 36). Smith (1994; 2004b) makes a similar move, invoking the idea of Ideal Agents who are omniscient and perfectly rational. Derek Baker describes these views as follows: ‘You ought to  $\mathcal{A}$  because you would  $\mathcal{A}$  (or *advise* your benighted counterpart to  $\mathcal{A}$ ) if you were fully informed and all your rational dispositions and capacities were perfectly functioning’ (2015, 322).

These ‘full-information accounts of reasons for action’ (Sobel 2001a, 229; see also Kiesewetter 2011, 1), then, do not accept the agent’s particular epistemic situation. They do not give weight to what the agent actually believes or, given her circumstances and capabilities, might reasonably be expected to come to believe. Instead, they argue that the agent’s epistemic situation should be abstracted from and hold that the agent’s reasons are discovered in a process of ‘ideal deliberation’ (Sobel 2001b, 471). Benjamin Kiesewetter shows that, according to these views,

what the agent has reason to do is constrained by the *facts* and not by the agent's 'beliefs, knowledge or evidence' (2011, 1). And as Carolyn Mason points out, these accounts paint the picture of a 'god-like view, where an omniscient observer knows all the relevant information' (2012, 120; see also Mason 2006, 167).

I believe this is implausible as an understanding of deliberation and not just because, as Baker (2015) argues, omniscient beings cannot rationally deliberate about what to do. Let me briefly spell out two objections which I both relate to Mason's revised gin-tonic example. Mason (2012, 55) asks us to imagine two different agents desiring to drink a gin-tonic. One is a mechanic whose sensory faculties function properly and who is standing in his friend's garage noticing a half-full gin bottle next to a rum bottle containing a blue liquid. The other is a blind person lacking a sense of smell who has ordered a bottle of gin from his reliable supplier of groceries. Unbeknownst to him, he has received a gin bottle that a prankster at the bottling factory filled with petrol. The *first* objection against full-information accounts of practical reasons is that, by abstracting from the agent's particular epistemic situation, they have to hold that there is no relevant difference between these two very different agents. That is to say, such accounts are deeply impersonal. *Second*, such idealized accounts allow for the possibility of counterintuitive conclusions. According to these accounts, both agents do not have a reason to mix the fluid in the gin bottle with tonic and drink it, simply because it contains petrol. This, it seems to me, is counterintuitive because it fundamentally neglects the fact that, given his epistemic situation, it is very reasonable for the blind man to believe that the gin bottle actually contains gin. I submit that, since it is very reasonable for him to believe that the gin bottle actually contains gin, he has reason to drink the petrol. This is an example of the way in which my account, by demanding that agents deliberate to the best of their ability, makes reasons for action dependent on reasons for belief.

These considerations press us to attend to the epistemic differences between agents and suggest that these differences affect what they have reason to do. Practical reasoning is irreducibly related to what actual agents can reasonably be expected to come to know or realise. Consequently, I think that we have good reason to leave the demand of ideal deliberation behind, while also steering clear of the sub-Humean lack of concern for the rationality of the agent's beliefs. Instead, we should be concerned about the rationality of the agent's beliefs, but not demand ideal deliberation. Following Mason's (2012, v) more modest proposal I think we should say that agents should reason to 'the best of their ability'.<sup>1</sup> This is still demanding, but by connecting the agent's deliberation to her particular epistemic situation, it takes seriously both the limits of her cognitive abilities, and practical constraints on what she can come to know.

This account, then, emphasizes the necessity of a relation between an agent's reasons and her motivations (broadly understood), and conceives of deliberation in terms of deliberating to the best of one's ability. It can be formulated as follows: A has a reason to  $\Phi$  only if she could reach the conclusion to  $\Phi$  by deliberating to the best of her ability from the motivations she already has. It is important to note that that conclusion does not have to be absolutely certain to constitute a reason for action. In some situations, deliberating to the best of one's ability will lead to a conclusion that is uncertain. This can be expressed by saying that although one has some strong indications that one's desire will be fulfilled in  $\Phi$ -ing, it cannot be ruled out completely that it will not. Given the strong indications for believing that one's desire will in fact be fulfilled in  $\Phi$ -ing, however, one can be said to have a reason to  $\Phi$ . Yet, what exactly counts as good grounds is usually something the agent herself should judge.

The differences between my account and accounts that advocate an idealized understanding of deliberation might seem quite subtle, but in discussing the issue of transformative choice it becomes obvious that they have fundamentally different implications. One of the upshots of the view I have argued for is that it is sensitive to situations agents find themselves in most of the time: situations in which the agent – either contingently or for principled reasons – does not have sufficient access to the facts that pertain to her desires and/or her action(s). It is this situation the agent is pre-eminently in when she faces a transformative choice.

### **3. Transformative choice**

Transformative choices present us with a fundamental problem, as Paul persuasively argues in *Transformative Experience*. In this section I will make clear what the problem is that Paul brings to the fore, and, more specifically, in which respects transformative choices present a problem to my conception of having a reason for action. Again, the issue is vital, since it would be very unfortunate if our account of practical reasons would be unable to provide guidance with regard to choices which are so significant that at least sometimes they press us towards believing that we have reason to make them.

Paul argues that, as humans, we can (and will) find ourselves in situations in which we face significant choices that will probably transform our lives, but in which, *for principled reasons*, we do not have access to the information we need in order to make (what according to normative decision theories counts as) a rationally justified decision. Normally, when we face a choice, we deliberate about the different courses of action we can take, imagine ourselves in these different scenarios, assign subjective value to different possible outcomes, and then (at least, when we

intend to act rationally) choose the action that best fits our preferences (or maximizes expected subjective value) (Paul 2014, 21–22). Rational agency, on this view, consists in acting in accordance with our preferences; granted, of course, that we are justified, *first*, in believing that these particular outcomes will result from our choices, and, *second*, in the ascription of these particular subjective values (on the basis of our preferences) to those outcomes.

Paul argues that this deliberative strategy fails with regard to *transformative choices* such as the choice to become a vampire, the choice to become a parent for the first time, or the choice of a deaf person to receive cochlear implants. Such choices are transformative in both an epistemic and a personal way. Epistemic, because it involves the choice to have ‘a new and different kind of experience, a kind of experience that teaches her something she could not have learned without having that kind of experience’ (Paul 2014, 10). What it teaches her is *what it is like* to be a vampire, parent, or hearing person. Personal, because ‘[t]he experience can be life-changing in that it changes what it is like to be you. That is, it can change your point of view, and by extension, your personal preferences, and perhaps even change the kind of person that you are or at least take yourself to be’ (2014, 16).

The problem transformative choices confront us with, Paul argues, is that they have a structure that conflicts with the requirements of ordinary normative decision theory. That is, transformative choices do not allow us to ascribe subjective values to the different courses of action we can take. The reason is that ‘you cannot know what it is like to have that kind of experience until you’ve had it’ (Paul 2014, 32). Naturally, if you cannot know this beforehand, you cannot ascribe subjective value to it, which also implies that you cannot compare the different subjective values of the different courses of action. However, Paul believes the issue is even more profound since the choice might also be personally transformative. Undergoing the experience might very well change who you are, which includes your preferences, the things you deem important in life, the projects you pursue, and so forth. Given the relation of subjective values to these psychological facts, this implies that ‘the values you would (*per impossibile*) assign [to] these outcomes before having the transformative experience could be radically different from the values you’d assign to the relevant outcomes *after* having had the experience’ (Paul 2014, 32). That is, we cannot make a transformative choice in a rationally justified fashion because we cannot compare our current self and its preferences with our future self and its preferences. She writes:

If you are to choose rationally, the preferences you have right now seem to have priority, such that to choose rationally you must choose in accordance with the preferences you

have now. But your pre-experience information is dramatically incomplete, due to the epistemic inaccessibility of the values of the radically new outcomes. Under such circumstances, why should you be biased towards the preferences of your present self, the epistemically impoverished self? (Paul 2014, 49)

Thus, transformative choices, on Paul's view, present us with a fundamental problem: we can only obtain the relevant information we need in order to make a rationally justified decision *after* we have already made the choice.

While I agree with Paul that transformative choices involve an epistemic and a personal transformation, and while I agree that this creates a genuine problem, I do not think the problem is as profound as Paul suggests it is. Paul's presentation of the problem assumes that one should compare one's (expected) preference satisfaction before and after the choice (which we are unable to do for the reasons explicated above) – that is, it assumes that one should give equal weight to one's current and future preferences. This is the reason she describes giving priority to one's current preferences as a *bias*. Apparently, then, she believes that one's current, pre-choice self and one's future, post-choice self have an equal claim to our attention. I believe this is problematic for at least three reasons. *First*, Paul (2014, 24–30) stresses, as we have seen, that we should assess transformative choices from a first-person point of view, from the standpoint of subjective deliberation. Adopting that standpoint, it is very reasonable to give priority to one's current preferences. *Second*, it seems that it is in light of my *current* preferences (or, more broadly, my current subjective motivational set) that a transformative choice can present itself to me as a real and meaningful possibility. The fact that I do not deliberate about the choice to change careers and become a full-time ornithologist is related to the fact that I am motivated to pursue an academic career in philosophy. And conversely, if that choice would present itself to me as a real option, it would necessarily relate to my current subjective motivational set. *Third*, since the nature of transformative choice prevents one from knowing what one's future, post-choice self with its preferences will look like (we cannot even know that the choice will *in fact* involve a personal transformation, something that Paul does not pay attention to), means that it does not – and, in any case, should not – have an equal claim to my attention. Prioritizing one's current preferences (or, more broadly, one's *current* subjective motivational set) in assessing whether one should make the transformative choice does not, I submit, involve a bias but is a perfectly reasonable thing to do.

Importantly, this is not to say that transformative choices do not pose a problem. In my view, however, the nature of the problem transformative choices present us with differs from

what Paul argues the problem is. For Paul, the core issue is that, although we should compare our (expected) preference satisfaction before and after a transformative choice, there is principally no way of doing that. On my view, the core problem is that, although we should prioritize our current subjective motivations, we principally cannot know whether they are fulfilled in making a transformative choice. I believe that the problem transformative choices present us with is a particularly deep and challenging instance of the problem of making choices under conditions of uncertainty about outcomes. Thus, although I subscribe to Paul's understanding of the *nature* of transformative choices, I do not agree with her presentation of the core *problem* of transformative choices.

The issue of rational agency is not necessarily identical to the issue of having a reason for action,<sup>2</sup> but it is clear that transformative choices also pose a problem for my account of practical reasons. Facing the choice to become a parent for the first time, the kind of internalism I have advocated presses me to ask 'Do I have reason to believe that becoming a parent fulfills one or more elements of my current subjective motivational set?'. The analysis above suggests that I cannot answer this question in a meaningful way. Whether my current desires will be fulfilled in becoming a parent is something that I can only come to know *after* I have decided to become a parent, which seems to imply that I cannot have a reason to become a parent.

Here it becomes clear that my account and accounts that advocate an idealized understanding of deliberation have very different ways of approaching the issue of transformative choice. As we have seen, Williams argues that having a reason to make a choice is dependent on the facts that pertain to whether my desires are fulfilled in making it (when I desire to drink gin, I have reason to drink the fluid in front of me only when it is *in fact* gin). With regard to *transformative* choice, the important question we need to ask is whether ideal deliberation provides access to the facts that pertain to whether my desires are fulfilled in making it. Now, if it is argued that it *does*, there are two problems. *First*, we have seen that the problem transformative choices present us with is that there are principled reasons why we do not have access to the facts that pertain to them. Thus, proponents of an idealized understanding of deliberation need to tell a convincing story of how ideal deliberation is able to provide access even to facts that we, *for principled reasons*, do not have access to. I am not sure that that is possible. *Second*, when ideal deliberation provides access to the facts that pertain to transformative choices, the question of whether or not I have reason to make a transformative choice ceases to be a problem. Yet, as Paul shows and our experiences tell us, it *is* a genuine problem. If, on the other hand, it is argued that ideal deliberation *does not* provide access to the facts that pertain to transformative choices, this implies that we cannot know, for principled reasons, whether we have reason to make them.

In that case the idealized account is unable to provide the actual agent with resources for making the choice. And, as I have already noted, that would be unfortunate.

On my account, the agent's predicament of reasoning about making a transformative choice cannot be overcome by appealing to an idealized conception of deliberation. I think we should understand deliberation (in the face of transformative choices) in terms of what actual agents can reasonably be expected to come to know or realize. Yet, by accepting the agent's particular epistemic situation and 'merely' demanding that she deliberates to the best of her ability, it seems that my account is left without resources to answer the question of whether she has reason to make a transformative choice. It seems, then, that there is no solution to the problem of transformative choice.

Interestingly, while acknowledging the difficulties that transformative choices present for normative decision theory, Paul argues that agents facing such choices *can* make rationally justified decisions. Paul's (2014, 4) solution is to understand transformative choice as confronting the agent, on a deeper level, with the decision of whether he or she wants to discover who he or she will become. For example, the decision whether or not to have a child is simultaneously, as well as more fundamentally, the decision of whether or not one wants to find out who one will become as a parent. On Paul's view, *that* decision *can* be made rationally, because – contrary to the decision whether or not to have a child – we can reliably assign subjective value, related to our subjective preferences, to those options. She writes: '[i]f you choose to have the transformative experience, to choose rationally, you must prefer to discover whether and how your preferences will change. If you choose to avoid the transformative experience, to choose rationally, you must prefer not to discover whether and how your preferences will change' (2014, 118).

Yet, the problem with this solution is that it does not reformulate what is essentially the *same* question, but that it raises and answers a *new* question. The choice to become a parent is not obviously identical to the choice to discover whether and how one's preferences will change. And the choice to avoid becoming a parent is not obviously identical to the choice to refrain from discovering whether and how one's preferences will change. To be clear, they *can* be identical: it is conceivable, for example, that one chooses to become a parent because one wants to discover whether and how one will change. Yet, this seems a rather peculiar motivation to become a parent. Paul's proposed solution entails that the transformative choices we face are, on a fundamental level, not about having a child, receiving cochlear implants or becoming a vampire, but about discovering who we will become as a result of making such choices. We thus see how it turns our attention away from what we spontaneously regard as most important in the choices we

face; it makes the artificial move of replacing the substantial motivations that pertain to the options we have with the experimental motivation of discovering who we will become. In any case, the problem of transformative choice is not really solved by Paul's proposed way out. It might be true that the choice to become a parent can be rationally justified if one treats it as a choice of whether or not one wants to discover who one will become, but many people will not treat it as such a choice<sup>3</sup> and, given the peculiarity of this move, it is unreasonable to demand that they do.

What does this imply for my conception of practical reasons? I could construct a solution that is analogous to Paul's. This would entail, for example, reformulating the question 'Do I have reason to become a parent?' as 'Is my desire to discover whether and how my preferences will change, satisfied in my choice to become a parent?'. Yet, it is obvious that this suggestion faces the exact same problems. Consequently, this attempt to solve the problem that transformative choice poses for my account of practical reasons – reformulating the issue in terms of whether or not one wants to discover who one will become – is unsuccessful.

#### **4. Trust**

Paul's solution aims to remove the principled uncertainty such choices present agents with. Reformulating the choice the agent faces serves precisely this goal: it replaces a choice that is marked by principled uncertainty with a choice that we can reach certainty about (we can be certain whether we (do not) want to discover who we will become as the result of a transformative choice). By contrast, and in line with my critique of both her solution and accounts of ideal deliberation, I want to retain the principled uncertainty agents face when deliberating about transformative choices, since that uncertainty is a necessary component of the actual situations these agents find themselves in.

Accepting the agent's epistemic situation, and the principled uncertainty that comes with it, implies that her deliberation cannot be ideal in the sense that she, before having made the choice, will be able to establish whether her desires are actually realized in making the choice. It might seem that this leaves us with just one alternative: a blind leap of faith, a wild guess. However, this view – either my choice is rationally vindicated in the demanding sense explicated above, or it is merely a wild guess – is too rigid. The suggestion I want to bring forward, is that we can regard trust as a way of making a transformative choice under constraints of principled uncertainty, and that, when trust is reasonable, we have reason to make a transformative decision.

Let me begin by inquiring when trust is appropriate. To be clear, in asking that question I am not inquiring whether trust is justified or reasonable, but I am asking in what kind of

epistemological situation trust is a ‘fitting’ response. Now, I think we should say that trust seems to be ‘at home’ in situations in which I find myself between certainty and the (total) lack thereof. Rik Peels puts this point as follows: ‘Trust that X will  $\Phi$  seems to require that one has at least *some* reason (some evidence) that X will  $\Phi$  but not *perfect* reason (conclusive evidence) that X will  $\Phi$ ’ (2017, 6). When I have conclusive evidence that you are a trustworthy person (for instance, I have been tracking your every move), or when there is some *guarantee* that you are trustworthy, trust seems inappropriate (McLeod 2015). If, on the other hand, I do not have *any* evidence in favor of your trustworthiness, the appropriate response would be a wild guess but not trust.

Consequently, relative to a lack of conclusive evidence, trust involves risk or venture but it is not identical to simply taking a wild guess. That trust is different from taking a wild guess can also be shown from a phenomenological point of view. We typically experience unsuccessful wild guesses – for example, in games – in terms of having had ‘bad luck’, whereas we typically experience a betrayal of our trust as the painful feeling of being let down by the other, as well as feeling annoyed with ourselves for having been so naive (cf. Holton 1994, 66; Stern 2017, 275). Not only would it be odd to experience a betrayal of one’s trust merely in terms of having had bad luck, it also seems unreasonable to hold a grudge, and feel let down, hurt or annoyed when one has merely taken a wild guess.

Thus, trust seems appropriate in situations that are marked by fundamental uncertainty, but in which we are not clueless. This is important, because it makes clear that trust is ‘at home’ in the kinds of existential situations we are in when we face transformative choices. There is, as we have seen, a principled uncertainty involved with regard to such choices, but we are not clueless. Although I cannot know what it is to become a parent for the first time before actually becoming it, I might have access to the testimony of actual parents, I might have taken care of a younger sibling, I might have experienced the love we tend to feel for those who are completely dependent on us, I might know what it feels like to receive little sleep over a long period of time, I might have experienced what it is to have very little time for birdwatching, and so forth.

What, exactly, is trust? Despite the fact that we can easily come up with counter-examples to the existing definitions of trust and that, as Thomas Simpson has argued, it would therefore perhaps be best to acknowledge that the term ‘describe[s] different things on different occasions’ (2012, 555), I find it useful to start from a definition and use that as a point of reference for my exploration of trust as a response to transformative choices.<sup>4</sup> In an article that has become the starting point for discussions of trust in Anglophone philosophy, Annette Baier famously describes trust as ‘accepted vulnerability to another’s possible but not expected ill will (or lack of good will) toward one’ (1986, 235). This description of trust is the conclusion of a passage that is

worth quoting at length: ‘When one depends on another’s good will, one is necessarily vulnerable to the limits of that good will. One leaves others an opportunity to harm one when one trusts, and also shows one’s confidence that they will not take it. Reasonable trust will require good grounds for such confidence in another’s good will, or at least the absence of good grounds for expecting their ill will or indifference’ (1986, 235). On this view, trust involves a relation between persons, where the trusting person depends or relies on the good will of the trusted person, which leaves the trusting person vulnerable to harm. It understands trust as an attitude of being confident, and it stresses that that confidence should have good grounds for trust to be reasonable.

I find this, on the whole, a clear and helpful understanding of trust and I will continue to refer to it throughout the remainder of this article. However, a serious shortcoming of this definition is that it understands trust exclusively as pertaining to another person(s). Most philosophers have followed Baier in doing so. Although it is clear that such interpersonal trust is the ‘dominant paradigm’ (McLeod 2015) and although I find Simpson’s genealogical argument that the phenomenon of trust came into being in ‘the basic forms of social life’ (2012, 557) compelling, I think – as does Simpson – there are genuine cases of trust outside of interpersonal contexts. It is possible and sensible, for example, to speak of trusting institutions (cf. Potter 2002), trusting one’s climbing gear (in case of a descend down a cliff), trusting one’s body (something those suffering or recovering from cancer often claim they struggle with), trusting technology (something that becomes increasingly relevant in light of the development of, for example, artificial intelligence [cf. Coeckelbergh 2012]), or something that we can rather vaguely describe as having ‘trust in life’ (something that people who are suffering from major psychological problems sometimes claim they lack). Some of these are rather similar to interpersonal trust, while others are quite different. Speaking of trusting my climbing gear, for example, can count as an instance of trust because it has ‘connotations of exposure to risk and uncertainty of outcome’ (Simpson 2012, 565). An openness to the possibility of quite different forms of trust is important for understanding the roles it can play in diverse situations in human life. I propose, therefore, that we expand Baier’s account to make it include such examples as given above cases, and say, quite generally, that trust involves confident reliance in which one is vulnerable to such experiences as harm, betrayal and disappointment. (There are, undoubtedly, forms of trust that are not captured by this understanding, but that is not important for my argument since my proposed definition captures what is involved in trust with regard to transformative choices.)

As we have seen, trust can be a fitting response in situations in which one faces a transformative choice. What does trust amount to in such situations? Much depends, of course, on the kind of transformative choice one faces. Let us again look at the decision to have one's first child. Here, one might trust that having a child will deepen a sense of meaning to one's life, that one is able to provide loving care for one's child, that one's partner will be a good parent; but one's trust might also pertain to the testimony about these (and other) themes of those who already have a child; moreover, in case of having children through pregnancy, it might also involve reliance on the reproductive abilities of one's own and/or one's partner's body. These are genuine cases of trust, as they involve confident reliance in which one is vulnerable to harm, betrayal, disappointment.

However, the vital issue is not whether these are instances of trust (although they are), nor whether trust is a 'fitting' response in situations of transformative choice (although it is), but whether one can have reason to make a transformative choice. Answering that question, to recall, implies that it needs to be established that one can have reason to believe that one's desires are fulfilled in making that choice. The question we should ask, then, is whether one's trust that one's desires are fulfilled in making a transformative choice can be reasonable.

The issue of reasonable or warranted trust is, arguably, the most controversial topic in philosophical discussions of trust. One of the reasons why this is so, is that it relates to the much debated issue of epistemological internalism and externalism. I cannot get into that debate here, but it will be obvious that my argument so far tends to the internalist position. Above I have argued that, with regard to such existentially pertinent issues as transformative choices, it is important to do justice to the agent's particular epistemic situation with its limitations, as well as to the fact that the agent herself should have access to the facts and considerations that bear on her decision. With regard to the issue of reasonable trust, this position is mirrored in the common sense requirement that 'trustors *themselves* have good reasons for trusting, especially when their trust makes them seriously vulnerable' (McLeod 2015; my italics).

There are two issues relating to the problem of reasonable trust: one that pertains to reasonable trust in general, and one that pertains to reasonable trust in relation to transformative choices. The former is the tension 'between trusting somebody and rationally reflecting on the grounds for that trust' (McLeod 2015). The attempt to establish whether one's trust is reasonable is paradoxical in the sense that it aims for certainty, while, as we have seen, trust essentially presupposes a situation of uncertainty. Aiming for the certainty that one's trust is warranted threatens to make trust impossible (as is painfully clear in the case of jealousy). The latter is the tension between transformative choice and the possibility of reasonable trust. Although, on the

one hand, the (principled) uncertainty that pertains to transformative choice creates the possibility of trust it seems that, on the other hand, the radical kind of uncertainty involved undermines the possibility of having good grounds for one's trust. Does transformative choice indeed undermine the possibility of reasonable trust?

Baier, to recall, describes reasonable trust as follows: 'Reasonable trust will require good grounds for such confidence in another's good will, or at least the absence of good grounds for expecting their ill will or indifference' (1986, 235). Although, as I have argued above, trust extends beyond the interpersonal realm, I find this two-sided characterization helpful. I am aware that understanding the reasonableness of trust in terms of having good grounds for confidence is not the only way to think about this issue. Yet, by understanding the reasonableness of trust in terms of having good grounds, Baier formulates a modest demand that is very appealing, because it departs both from the idea that trust requires no grounds (which turns trust into a wild guess) and from the idea that trust requires (what I will vaguely call) a 'full-blown' justification (which seems to annihilate the possibility of trust, as we have seen above). In accordance with Baier's two-sided characterization, I believe there are two reasons why transformative choices do not undermine the possibility of reasonable trust. *First*, for my trust to be reasonable, it is enough that I do not have good grounds for expecting that my current desires will *not* be fulfilled in making a transformative choice. That is, in the absence of evidence (I have access to) that suggests that becoming a parent will *not* bestow a deep sense of meaning on my life, that it will be a deeply frustrating experience for me, and so forth, trusting that my current desires will be fulfilled in becoming a parent will be reasonable. The important point here is that, for my trust to be reasonable, it is not necessary for me to have (positive) good grounds for expecting that my current desires will be fulfilled in making a transformative choice. However – and this is the *second* reason – transformative choices do not undermine the possibility of such (positive) good grounds. The evidence I have access to when I am deliberating might suggest that my desires will actually be fulfilled in making the transformative decision. I might feel inspired by what my friend, who is rather like me, tells me about raising his child, I might have thoroughly enjoyed taking care of my younger sibling, I might have experienced how deeply I feel connected to my partner each time I noticed how she lovingly takes care of her friends' child, and so forth. Now, while it is certainly possible that the experience of becoming a parent turns out very differently than I expected it to be, this does not undermine the fact that, *at the moment of deliberation*, the evidence suggested that becoming a parent for the first time would fulfill my desires.

One could ask whether there is some criterion that can be used to determine which indications count as good grounds. In light of the conception of deliberation I have brought

forward in this article, it will be unsurprising that I believe that, with regard to transformative choices, trust counts as reasonable when it is the result of the agent deliberating to the best of his or her ability in a situation of principled uncertainty. Consequently, we can, at most, phrase a general demand that insists that the agent reflects on the strength of the indications she has for her trust, and on the question of whether there are indications she is currently perhaps unconscious of that might cast doubt on the indications that function in her deliberation. Although this account gives central importance to the agent's own point of view, it does not imply that the agent is an isolated deliberator. On the contrary, deliberating to the best of one's ability also implies being open to other people's view on oneself, one's situation, one's motivations, and so forth. Yet, what my account rules out is the possibility that an agent's trust can be judged as unreasonable in light of considerations that she herself does not have access to. Whether my indications for trust with regard to a transformative choice qualify as good grounds is – given the fact that they pertain to such deeply personal matters as one's current situation in life, one's motivations, one's capabilities, and so forth – something only I myself can judge.

Taking the different parts of the argument of this section together, we should conclude: *first*, that, given the fact that the epistemic situation in which we encounter a transformative choice is tainted by principled uncertainty though not cluelessness, trust is an appropriate response to a transformative decision, because trust itself presupposes such a situation; and *second*, that trust can be reasonable, and that, when one's trust that one's current desires are fulfilled in making a transformative choice is reasonable, one has a reason to make it.

## Conclusion

In this article I have reflected on the question of whether we can have reason to make transformative choices. In attempting to answer it, I have done three things. *First*, I have brought forward an internalist account of practical reasons which does not depend on an understanding of practical reasoning as ideal deliberation, but, instead, holds that agents should reason to the best of their ability. *Second*, I have discussed Paul's views on transformative choice, arguing that, although they present a problem to my account of practical reasons, the problem is not as profound as she believes it is. Whereas Paul argues the agent's deliberations should, *per impossibile*, involve comparing expected preference satisfaction of her pre-choice self and her post-choice self, I argue that it is very reasonable for an agent facing a transformative choice to deliberate from her current motivations. *Third*, I have argued that, given the situation in which we face transformative choices (a situation of principled uncertainty though not cluelessness), trust is an appropriate response to transformative choices, and that when one's trust that one's current

desires will be fulfilled in making a transformative choice is reasonable, one has a reason to make it.

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<sup>1</sup> This account, then, connects a view of practical reasoning as deliberating to the best of one's ability with an internalist understanding of reasons for action. In doing so, it is distinguished from the account brought forward by Mason, who explicitly denies that her understanding of practical reasons as 'justifiable reasons' amounts to a kind of internalism about reasons (2012, 107).

<sup>2</sup> For an in-depth and clear discussion of this issue, see Sobel (2001b).

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Barnes writes: 'When I choose not to have children, it isn't simply a choice to avoid 'revelation' or a choice made 'for the sake [or lack of] discovery itself'. It is, quite simply, a choice not to have children because I know I don't want them.' (Barnes 2015, 785)

<sup>4</sup> Even Simpson himself, despite his skeptical approach, develops a genealogical 'root notion of trust', 'Ur-trust', which he then uses as a reference point in reflection on different forms of trust. (Simpson 2012, 557)