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Experiencing Changes and Changing Experiences: Pauline Transformation and Altered Sensory Capacities

In her book, *Transformative Experiences*, L.A. Paul argues that certain decisions involve options that, if chosen, would radically transform a person's preferences and values. In such situations, due to unavoidable epistemic limitations, the person cannot rationally anticipate what the future self will be like on the other side of the change. Put simply, one must undergo the transformative experiences in order to know what it is like to be a person with the new values and preferences that the changes produce. She discusses, for example, the experience of gaining new sensory capacities through technological means, and she gives special attention to the experiences of those who gain new hearing capacities by receiving a cochlear implant. The choice, she argues, not only generates a sense of sound for the recipient, but it also changes her ways of perceiving and interpreting the world, her preferences, and her values. Moreover, this decision can also alter relationships by creating new bonds with those in hearing communities but alienating one from people in deaf communities. In sum, such a change produces a new experience of selfhood.

In Philippians 3:1–11, the apostle Paul describes the results of a transformative experience with similar features as those that L.A. Paul analyzes. In this context, Paul has undergone a change that has produced new values and preferences that differ radically from what his prior self could have predicted apart from the experience itself. What he formerly “regarded” (ἡγέομαι) as gains (cf. 1:21), he now regards as loss. From his new vantage point, he actually refers to circumcision as “mutilation” (κατατομή in 3:2a) and to his previous “gains” not as less valuable, but as “waste” (σκόβαλον). Moreover, Paul's relationships have transformed completely, transitioning him from a persecutor of the church (v. 6) to an apostle. How should we understand the nature of Paul's transformation in terms of how it has altered his experience of selfhood? In this paper I will put research on the phenomenology of transformations often experienced by people who receive cochlear implants into conversation with Paul's descriptions in Philippians. I will argue that insights from the nature of the complex transformations that people often undergo by receiving cochlear implants can shed light onto the experiential and subjective dimensions of the transformations that Paul describes in Philippians 3.