

# Big Decisions, Transformative Choices, and Self-Creation (Part 2): The Paradox of Self-Creation

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## The Paradox of Self-Creation

Callard is interested in understanding *transformational pursuits*: activities that aim at values that can only be fully appreciated after having performed the activity in question.

How can this be done? And can it be done *rationally*?

### Galen Strawson's Self-Creation Paradox:

Self-creation involves taking steps to form new values.

These new values, either, follow rationally from values I already have or they are rationally unconnected from my current values.

If the values follow rationally from the values I already have, then I do not do any *creating*. My "new" self was already, all along, contained in my old self.

If the values are rationally unconnected from my current values, then I do not do any creating. The self I end up with may be new, but it is not the product of my own agency.

## Self-Endorsement

*Self-endorsement*: you, or some part of you, steps back from, appraises, and attaches a positive or negative evaluation to the aspect of yourself that you evaluate.

For the theorist of **self-endorsement**,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  represent divisions within a person at a given time.  $S_1$  is one's evaluative system, and  $S_2$  is whatever feature (or prospective feature) of oneself one is using that system to evaluate. If  $S_2$  is endorsed, this is because  $S_1$  has done the endorsing.

You are in a position to endorse only what you already value. So, self-endorsement cannot represent a way of acquiring values.

## Self-Cultivation

*Self-cultivation*: the process of working to satisfy "anterior normative commitments" about what kind of person to become.

Callard thinks the answer to both questions is "yes"—and it's because we can act on *proleptic reasons*, which "are provisional in a way that reflects the provisionality of the agent's own knowledge and development: her inchoate, anticipatory, and indirect grasp of some good she is trying to know better" (72)

She says: "Proleptic reasons allow you to be rational even when you know that your reasons aren't exactly the right ones."

What follows from this problem? That it's *impossible* to work to form new values? Or that it's *irrational* to?

For the theorist of **self-cultivation**,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  are different time slices of the person. If the person has cultivated a feature in herself, then  $S_2$  should have that feature because  $S_1$  did something—made a commitment or a resolution—picking that feature out as the one to be acquired.

Callard worries that this invites a regress. She says:

Whenever we tie some new value to an act of self-cultivation, we must admit the arbitrariness of the choice or push the source of the cultivation back a further step. And this regress is a vicious one: as we retreat backwards through a person's selves, we encounter selves that are less and less, and eventually not at all, in a position to do any creating. And shortly thereafter, of course, we run out of self altogether.

### *Aspirational Agency*

On an *aspirational account*: self-creation is agent-driven learning in the domain of value. The agent doesn't (yet) have, or even fully understand, the values she aims to inculcate.

Callard says, "The aspirant's ignorance . . . runs "all the way down," in the sense that she cannot be sure, until she is no longer an aspirant, that she even wants to acquire the relevant value.

#### **Responding to the Self-Creation Paradox**

(a) *Normative Dependence*

"There is a normative dependence relation between two items when norms apply to the one item in virtue of the fact that, in the first instance, they apply to the other."

(b) *Priority of Created Self*

"Instead of imagining my future self as beholden to my past self, I suggest we imagine my past self as looking forward, trying to live up to the person she hopes to become."

(c) *Strawson's Two Requirements:*

*The Continuity Requirement:*  $S_1$  and  $S_2$  stand in some normative dependence relation.

*The Novelty Requirement:*  $S_2$  must contain a value or values not dependent on the values of  $S_1$ .

(d) *Self-Creation by Aspiration*

$S_1$  aspires to be  $S_2$ .

How does *aspiration* solve the puzzle? (Does it?)

"The way in which people stand toward many of the values that they do not fully appreciate is that they partly appreciate them. And with respect to some of these partly appreciated values, they also have the inclination to appreciate them more. They have a sense that their inchoate appreciation is incomplete, and act in order to attain a better valuation-condition. . . . Such people are, in effect, imitating or trying to live up to someone. They don't pre-approve of the person that they're trying to be; rather, they hope that the person they aspire to be would (and will!) approve of them. They see themselves as the imperfect version of that person who, in turn, serves as the standard by which they are to be assessed."