

## Linking Emotions to Needs: A Comment on *Mindsets, Rationality and Emotion in Multi-criteria Decision Analysis*

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### INTRODUCTION

First of all, let me express my gratitude to Fred Wenstøp for bringing the issue of emotions clearly into the MCDA discussion, and, additionally, to link it with ethics and normativity. Introducing emotion and therefore a high degree of subjectivity into a field where many still strive for objectivity only, is a challenge. Stating that considering emotions is the most important condition for rational decision making is another. In my eyes, Wenstøp lives up to both challenges, differently though. I will not so much comment his arguments which I find quite clearly stated, but try to be more precise on the notion of emotions which are still a bit blurry in his paper. Emotions or feelings is used in four different ways in his paper: (1) Biological phenomena (e.g. shivering, blood pressure), (2) individual representations of these phenomena (e.g. fear, anger, happiness), (3) such individual representations of biological phenomena caused by judgements of actions (e.g. pride, shame), or (4) by judgements over options or outcome bundles. This blurriness hinders him from being precise when coming to the conclusion. Without a clear notion of emotions, one cannot clearly indicate how one could consider them in a decision process. Without analysing how emotions relate to the normative force of decisions, one cannot indicate how one should consider them in a decision process. This latter point is a very difficult one, and I will show that Wenstøp did not succeed to make it, but that he did not need to make it either.

So, this flaw does not do any harm to his central point.

In the following, I will develop a notion of emotion which is helpful in the context of decision making, and use the fact that emotions arise when individual needs are satisfied or not satisfied. After dealing with the normative claim of Wenstøp's paper, I will link needs to criteria: Using criteria in a MCDA that are based on needs, and scoring options on their fulfilment of needs, necessarily evokes emotions which will then support the decision process. And, as I agree with the central statement of Wenstøp, a joint consideration of emotions and consequences leads to more rational decisions. The challenge for MCDA practitioners will be to reframe traditionally used criteria in a framework of needs, and to include emotions in the evaluation of options in order to reach more coherent results.

### EMOTIONS AND NEEDS<sup>1</sup>

Damasio and other neurologists show *ex positivo* and *ex negativo* that emotions enter decision processes and make them more coherent, i.e. more rational. Emotions arise when a person is confronted with a real or virtual situation relevant to her well-being. This relevance may be direct or in imagination (e.g. by sympathy: Smith 2000/1854). The emotion indicates that the situation is good for me ('positive' emotions) or bad ('negative' emotions). There is a rich vocabulary of emotions which is not very much used, though. Emotions show that one or several of the needs of a person are more or less fulfilled than before. These needs

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<sup>1</sup>This section has been inspired by Rosenberg (2001).

are the motivational force of action. There are different classifications of needs, for example the needs pyramid of Maslov (also used in marketing concepts). Needs refer necessarily to oneself, but include the well-being of others as there are social needs such as contributing to others' life or living in harmony. Needs are the basic motivations for actions, as the only sensible answer to the question why one wants, e.g. a more harmonious social life is to say that it makes one's life better (the same for sexuality, autonomy, spirituality, music, etc.). Needs have explicitly been used by the Chilean economist Max-Neef (Max-Neef *et al.*, 1991; Max-Neef, 1995) in order to re-orient development economics.

Emotions can be described as indicators for the fulfilment of needs. Mental states such as guilt or shame are often called (social) emotions or feelings but relate in fact to a moral judgement of a situation and not to a person's need. An example: A judge judges herself guilty (normally, one would say: 'feels' guilty) because she deems one of her actions (e.g. stealing) not right. 'Doing things right' is not a need, but may be strategy for a more harmonious social life, which is a need, or for the fulfilment of any other need. It is the fact of judging herself guilty which makes her feel bad (perhaps she feels 'small' or 'lost'), as she wants to be accepted as she is (which is her need) from everybody, including herself, and judging herself means not to accept herself.

#### USING EMOTIONS FOR LEADING A MORAL LIFE?

What is then the relationship between emotions and needs to moral theories such as virtue ethics (which is not always clearly distinguished from duty ethics in Wenstøp's paper), duty ethics or consequentialism? This is difficult to say.

Emotions and needs are descriptive concepts, and the way in which needs have been defined above leads to the tautological axiom: When one has well-founded beliefs, then fulfilling one's needs (i.e. in using emotions as indicators) should lead to a better life. But this is not yet normative, nor is it a moral theory. The task of showing theoretically that a better life for everybody would be the result of everybody trying to fulfil their own needs, has been undertaken by welfare economics (a consequentialist ethics) assuming only one dimension of needs and calling it utility (with results which

did not convince everybody). Showing it for multiple incommensurable needs would not be possible.

Virtue is a way of behaviour which can only be learned by practice, it is neither a simple rule (such as maximizing well-being) nor a set of rules (such as corporate core rules, probably purposively displayed as virtues for maintaining more freedom of action). According to Aristotle, a person only becomes virtuous, if she undertakes virtuous actions for many years.

Rules, as used by Wenstøp, need not necessarily be normative—they can also just be a short-cut for behaviour. Psychological studies show that we need such rules in order to be operational: we can't decide anew in every situation. But these rules don't necessarily tell me how I should behave in the best interest of all (such as the Kantian imperative), but can be intended to lead to an amoral or immoral life as well.

Why do we need this discussion about moral theories?

Wenstøp does not aim at a moral discussion of MCDA, his aim is to enable more rational decisions while using MCDA. By his last point on rationality: '4. Rationality of action would be achieved if the options with the highest expected utility is chosen', he declares himself not only consequentialist, but utilitarian. The main message of his paper would still be the same, if he would leave out this last point on rationality. He uses the debate on moral theories to make it plausible that decision makers don't necessarily think in a consequentialist way, but also use rules and may aspire to a virtuous life at the same time. This is plausible, and rather a result of psychology than of ethics. Wenstøp uses the stipulation of different mind-sets to state that MCDA regularly faces the problem of confronting virtue-oriented persons with a consequentialist mind-set. He gives the example of the local union leader confronted with layoffs. I'll take up this example later on—here, I just want to restate that the union leader, as Wenstøp describes her, is not virtue-oriented, but judges herself according to her supposed social role.

Linking this result, i.e. the difficulty of decision makers when being confronted with a purely consequentialist frame, to the concept of needs-motivated actions is not difficult. Consequentialism as any other moral theory is a theoretical construction and generally not linked to the needs and life of the decision maker. But these links are necessary for emotions and, hence, for rational decisions. One

may create these links by showing scenarios close to daily life, as suggested by Wenstøp. But, as emotions remain implicit in such a way, it is not clear in which way the decision is influenced by the emotions. Another, more direct way for MCDA would be to use needs-based criteria.

### NEEDS-BASED CRITERIA

Using needs as criteria for judging economic development has been proposed by Max-Neef (1991), and also the capability-approach by Sen (1987) and Nussbaum (2000) can be re-interpreted in this way. What is missing, though, is a procedure for assessing and evaluating concrete options and actions on the fulfilment of multiple needs or capabilities (Lessmann, 2004). Multi-criteria decision analyses propose such procedures. Most MCD analyses so far used quasi-objective criteria, and linked them to the utility or preferences of the decision-maker via utility or preference-functions. This is a detour when one aims at evoking emotions in the decision process. Using needs as criteria in MCDA should be more direct, more emotive, and, perhaps, more rational.

I will explain with Wenstøp's example of the union leader how this might work:

'Consider a local union leader who must decide whether she will accept some layoffs now and save the company for a foreseeable future, or refuse and thereby make the company vulnerable with more layoffs later as a possible consequence' (Wenstøp, this issue). Normally, criteria in MCDA would be such as: number of persons laid off, social equity of the layoff, increased probability of future existence of company, consequences of layoff for future events. Then, different options would be scored and evaluated according to her preference or utility function. Taking needs-based criteria would come up rather with the following:

- (1) Compassion and consideration principally for those persons concerned by the lay-offs;
- (2) Security and reliability concerning the actual and future decision context;
- (3) Self-respect for the role the union leader accepts in being a union leader;
- (4) Trust that the employees can have in the union leader after the decision;
- (5) Possibility of making one's decision understood;
- (6) Integrity concerning one's own values.

Regarding this list (which, of course, is dependent on the union leader's personality), one notes that the last four criteria normally would not come up in a normal decision process, but are considered 'privately'. Emotions caused by doubts on the fulfilment of these criteria would not let the union leader sleep for nights, which is a sign for their importance and liveliness. Taking them up 'officially' would integrate these emotions in the decision process, would make life easier for the union leader, and would, according to Wenstøp's thesis, make the decision more rational. The first (and to a minor extent also the second) criterion call for a participatory process so that the union leader can be clearer about the needs situation (concerning security, appreciation, inclusion, purposeful activity, etc.) of the employees or persons laid off after the decision to be taken. And, of course, the criteria will have to be substantiated with objective data wherever appropriate.

### CHALLENGE FOR MCDA

Where is the challenge for MCDA? Concerning the aggregation method, I think, there are enough methods able to deal with such a needs-based MCDA. What changes fundamentally, is the role of the analyst. The dialogue between the analyst and the decision maker must become much more personal, and the decisions become more personalized as well. Approaching needs and emotions deliberately is an approach much more familiar to psychotherapists than to engineers. Integrating 'hard', objective data might become more difficult, and less relevant to the decision process. At the same time, such a procedure would evoke emotions directly related to the decision to take, would address directly the issues (needs) important to the decision maker, and herewith enhance the possibility that MCDA contributes to their well-being.

I look forward to your comments (and thank again Fred Wenstøp for having inspired me).

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