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Decision-Making, Indecisiveness, and Responsibility: An Examination of Factors Influencing Decisions to be Either Intuitive or Deliberative and the Effects They Have on Creating Indecision and Ascribing Responsibility

Everyone makes decisions on a daily basis; however, people use different decision-making strategies: intuitions and rational deliberations. Certain decisions, such as what to eat for breakfast, seem to be quick processes that don't really require much thought; this occurs when we act on our intuitions. On the other hand, decisions such as where to attend college tend to be drawn out over many weeks or even months. We gather as much information as possible and use our reasoning skills to try to figure out what school is the best match for us. People also try to avoid regret. Thus, in order to avoid post-decisional regret, we spend time deliberating and reasoning so that we make a well-supported choice. People can enter into a state of decisional conflict due to a concern about possible losses following the decision. I will characterize intuition as an initial response to a situation or decision and I will characterize a deliberative decision as a logical process guided by reasoning. Although acting on intuitions and deliberating seem to be radically different processes, they are both similar in the sense that there are many subconscious and environmental factors present. Both intuitive and deliberative decisions are influenced by one's upbringing, anticipated regret, belief structures, one's environment, and many more innate traits that are imposed on the person by their environment. In this paper, I will explain how the abovementioned factors influence intuitions and deliberation; as well as why these factors are

important to consider while assessing a decision-making scenario, how these factors can lead to a state of indecisiveness, and the worry this poses for experimental philosophers. Lastly, I will argue that people should not be held completely responsible for a majority of their decisions (even in a nondeterministic universe) because of the influence that these factors have on the decision.

Each person has a personal preference for the strategy, usually either intuitive or deliberative, that they like to use when making decisions. We seek decisional fit. Of course, the strategy varies from decision to decision, but a person feels most comfortable when he or she uses the method that he or she is generally most comfortable with; this is known as decisional fit. Decisional fit is preferred because the decision-maker experiences less regret, even if it appears as though he or she had made the wrong choice. Betsch and Kunz examine the idea of decisional fit in their article "Individual Strategy Preferences and Decisional Fit." Not only is decisional fit preferred because of decreased post decisional regret, but it is also sought after because it "feels right:" "strategies that were reinforced in the past are likely to be selected when the same or a similar decision problem occurs" (533). Thus, we can assume that if a person grew up constantly hearing "go with your gut instinct," then his or her decision-making strategy of choice would most likely be intuitive. On the other hand, if a person was constantly told to consider all options and think through the choice, then the person would probably feel more comfortable using reasoning skills in the future. Thus, we develop a preference toward a specific strategy that was not decided by us; parents and other mentors early on in one's life pushed one toward feeling comfortable with a specific strategy.

Not only do experiences and social settings influence how we make a decision, but the way that we were taught to make decisions in the past also influences how we make a current decision.

It is natural for people to seek decisional fit because nobody wants to feel regret and doing what makes us feel comfortable we experience like the "feeling of rightness." As Betsch and Kunz explain, "intuitive people rely stronger on implicit knowledge than deliberates and highly rational people make more normatively correct answers than less rational people" (534). However, if a more intuitive person has to rely on rational logic, or vice versa, then a person will experience indecisiveness because decisional fit is not obtained, forcing one to make a decision that goes against their preferred strategy. This conflict makes deciding much more difficult and will lead to more negative emotions once the process is over. If one considers himself or herself a deliberator and is forced to follow his or her gut reaction without thoroughly considering many aspects of the choice, then one will experience more regret if he or she is wrong and may think that it was pure luck if he or she made the right choice. Immediately after the decision a person will most likely also doubt himself or herself and question his response more than if he had spent the time reasoning through the decision. Thus, decisional fit helps to avoid regret, if achieved, but also can help explain why some people are very uncomfortable and indecisive when they are forced to not use their preferred method.

These findings can have implications on philosophical thought experiments. They show that some people are comfortable using their intuitions while others are

not. People who have had intuitive behavior reinforced in the past are more trained to rely on implicit knowledge, whereas others who are less comfortable and less experienced making rapid decision will have trouble intuitively responding to thought experiments that are trying to measure human intuition as a whole. Thus, thought experiments may get accurate results if there is a balance between intuitive people and people who like to reason. If the researchers only survey people who are either good at responding more automatically or more slowly, then they might not get an accurate picture of human understanding. However, it doesn't seem as though there is a way to avoid this concern because it is possible that the folk are not consciously aware of their preferred strategy for decision-making. It seems as though the only way to discover a person's preferred decision-making strategy would be to ask each individual to outline his or her typical decision-making procedure.

We make decisions based on avoiding regret, which is why seeking decisional fit can help minimize post-decisional regret. Post-decisional regret depends on knowledge of the outcomes of the rejected alternative. Thus, trying to avoid regret will influence the decision that we make. By anticipating regret, we make more rational choices. In "Anticipated Regret, Expected Feedback and Behavioral Decision Making," Marcel Zeelenberg uses the idea of the maximum regret principle, which "holds that one computes the maximum of possible regret for each option, and then chooses the option where this maximum regret is smallest," to explain the impact that post decisional regret has on a person's decision. Most people who are regret averse seek the option that is the most regret minimizing. Thus, even if our

initial response may be in one direction, we may realize that it could possibly lead to the most regret and act against our intuitions. For example, if a person were filling out a survey and there was an ethical question in which people were asked what they would do, a person may choose the option that they know is "right," even if it is against his or her beliefs, because if they admit to choosing the "unethical" option, then they might feel guilty following the survey.

By trying to avoid regret, it seems that we can assume that one could easily enter into a state of indecisiveness. If there are two options that may lead to the same amount of regret, a person might enter a deadlock situation in which there is no seemingly "safe" answer. If two options (or more) seem to be associated with the same amount of regret, then a person may have to start examining other factors. Not only do they have to consider these other factors, but they also have to decide which factors are more significant and should have a larger influence. This will significantly slow down the decision-making process and inflict more stress and uncertainty on the person deciding, leading to a clear state of indecisiveness.

A person's belief structure influences both decisional fit and anticipated regret. Rediker et al, in the article entitled "The Effects of Strong Belief Structures on Information-processing Evaluations and Choice," discusses the effects of a strong belief structure on a person's decision-making strategy. Belief structures allow people to interpret information in a specific way: "People rely on highly structural, preexisting knowledge systems to interpret their organizational world and generate appropriate behaviors" (115). Thus, we can interpret the same information differently because we rely on our individual belief structures, which are learned

and vary from person to person depending on one's upbringing. Many different factors can influence a belief structure when a decision is presented, including, "the social or organizational context in which it occurs… different people bring different experiences, beliefs, and personal attributes to a particular decision" (114). We are all trained to think in a specific way that is consistent with the belief structure that has been imposed on us by our environment and experiences.

If all decisions rely on a certain belief structure, then a person cannot be fully morally responsible for his or her intuitions. We interpret information based on a belief structure; however, we do not create our own belief structures. Belief systems are forced upon us by society. Rediker et al claims, "knowledge is generated or strongly shaped by the interaction of individuals in a variety of cultural powerful settings such as the family, school or workplace" (115). If knowledge is formed from our interactions with other people (our family) and our environment (school or workplace), then our intuitions cannot be solely ours. This has a profound effect on decision making because knowledge structures affect "a wide variety of basic cognitive processes including, attending, categorizing, memory storage, and retrieval, information seeking, filtering, motivation, and preliminary evaluation of choice alternatives" (115). We might not even realize it, but our decisions are heavily influenced by many uncontrollable factors in our lives and thus, we do not have complete control over the decisions that we make. Even if free will does exist, there are numerous thoughts in the back of our mind that others have instilled in us.

According to Rediker et al, some types of belief structures include images, feelings, schemas, mental images/ models, cognitive maps, frames, production

systems, scripts, and scenarios. Comparing a person's conscious decision to a person's implicit response can show the mass effects of these structures, such as schemas, which "refer to a series of interrelated beliefs about causal relationships" (115). A person's answer will differ depending on if he is subconsciously responding to stimuli, or if he is consciously processing information and deciding how he wants to respond. For example, many people claim to not be racist; however, when they take an implicit association test, their results usually show that they actually are slightly (if not more) naturally racist. In today's society, belief structures, as influenced by society, consider racism bad and against societal norms. Thus, we are taught to not be racist; however, we cannot control our subconscious racist attitudes.

Tamar Gendler provides an example of an "overcorrection of an initial instinctively racist response." In this example subjects were asked if they would sacrifice Chip (a white man) to save the Harlem Jazz Orchestra or if they would sacrifice Tyrone (a black man) to save the New York Philharmonic. Most subjects claimed that they are more likely to sacrifice Chip than Tyrone. People say that they would rather sacrifice the white man over the black man so that they do not appear racist when, in reality, their instinct was to sacrifice the black man. Thus, belief structures that are influenced by societal norms illustrate what beliefs are acceptable and what beliefs are not acceptable, causing people to act against their initial intuitions so that they are not shunned. Therefore, we cannot get an accurate picture of these types of intuitions in many experiments.

Despite creating artificial beliefs and untrustworthy decisions, belief structures can actually help to eliminate indecisiveness because it makes many decisions "easier" for us. Belief structures "resolve potential conflict among beliefs [by] establishing a hierarchy of among the beliefs, and adding details concerning the implications for specific action domains" (117). By having a preset notion of what beliefs are most important, decisions are made easier because we will automatically favor our more important beliefs. Belief structures also facilitate the decision making process because the structures help people to frame information in a clear way: strong belief structures should result in expectations of quicker decisions, more confidence in the decisions, less difficulty in making the decision, and greater acceptance of the decision than a weak belief structure" (119). It seems like we would be mistaken to hold a person accountable for a decision that he or she makes when they are trained by a "ready-made knowledge system." Decisions are made easier by these structures that were imposed on us by our surroundings. Also, people make more intuitive decisions than deliberating because they feel confident in their belief structure. They do not have to take the time to consider many factors because they have been trained to know which beliefs are most important.

Similar to altering decisions based on belief structures that are influenced by a person's environment, people also alter their behaviors based on who is watching them. Rigdon et al. conducted a study that demonstrates the effects of being watched (or even the sensation of being watched) on decision-making. In a study done in 2009, participants (n= 113; 51 men, 62 women) were presented with either the "face" or the "control" version of the task. The face consisted of three dots that

resembled two eyes and a mouth while the control had three dots that did not resemble a face. Participants were asked to write down how they would divide money ($10) between themselves and the receiver that they are paired with. Rigdon et al. found "that in the control condition 37% of men transferred $1.00 or more, but in the presence of a weak social cue (three dots arranged to look like a face) 79% of men transferred $1.00 or more to the "Receiver" they had been paired with (p= .006)" (Buckwalter and Stich, 25). From these results we can conclude that we do not always follow our intuitions; our behaviors vary based on if we are being watched. This is similar to how our decisions are influenced by societal pressures.

This task could elicit feelings of indecisiveness in subjects who experience the "face" version of the task. If, naturally, they want to take a certain amount of money, but they feel like they shouldn't because they feel like they are being watched, then their intuition becomes conflicted with their belief. They have an intuition to take money, but, at the same time, they know that they don't want to be negatively judged, which creates conflicting thoughts. In order to make the decision, they will have to examine their hierarchy of beliefs and which option will cause the most and least amount of post-decisional regret. These factors will prolong the decision.

Once again, our decisions vary within a given environment or social setting. People are concerned about how they are being judged and, thus, will usually act in a way that will get them the best reputation that they can achieve. The Rigdon et al. study raises the question of whether we are responsible for the decisions that we

make. One could argue that we are not responsible because of the societal pressure to act in a certain way. However, each individual chooses to acknowledge these norms and makes the choice to seek a good reputation and abide by the standards of society. Thus, we are free in the sense that it is possible to avoid these pressures, but it is very challenging to do so. Although we act free and feel free, there are restraints on our freedom. There is nothing that is physically stopping a person from ignoring the customs and taking all of the money, even if they feel like they are being watched. However, in reality is it actually possible to ignore the norms? The consequences of being judged negatively could range from just one person thinking poorly of you to being shunned and labeled as "bad" by society. It largely depends on who is watching or judging, which would actually make the observer the person who is responsible for the decision. Thus, how can we determine who to ascribe responsibility to? In certain circumstances it is the actual person making the decision; in other circumstances it can be the observer because the decision was changed just because of his mere presence.

Another factor to take into consideration when assessing the decision-making process is whether the decision is being made for the person deciding or for someone else. There are many situations in which we are asked to give advice to a friend or family member and help them make a decision. In the article, "The Role of Self-Esteem and Anxiety in Decision Making for Self versus Others in Relationships" by Wray and Stone, they argue, " people tend to make more risk-seeking decisions for others than for themselves" (125). This is because people will generally

experience less regret for others negative outcome compared to the regret they would feel after having a negative outcome of their own.

Wray and Stone's findings imply that people are more likely to act on intuition when making decisions for others. This seems to be because we will experience less regret if we are wrong and, thus, do not take into consideration all of the various factors. However, when one takes a step back to actually try to take the decision more seriously, one will commonly say, "if I were you, I would…." In this scenario, the person is trying to examine the other person's situation and put himself or herself in the other person's shoes. Not only can this be very misleading because each person has specific personal decision-making traits, but it also changes the decision from an intuition to reasoning and usually changes the answer. When a person intuitively decides what the other person should do, they choose the risk-seeking option. However, if they were considering what they personally would do, then they would usually avoid the risk after considering several different factors.

In the same article, Wray and Stone examine the effects of a person's self-esteem on how we make decisions. People who have high self-esteem "are more apt to self- enhance and thus make more risky choices." On the other hand, "concerns with social acceptance are more salient for individuals with lower self- esteem, which might deter them from actions that would undermine social acceptance" (127). A person's self-esteem is established based on his or her genetic predisposition as well as his or her environment. Self-esteem is generated within a person based on how he or she has been treated and how others have expressed their view toward the person. Thus, the person does not create his or her own self-

esteem; society can either enhance it or destroy it. This makes it difficult to attribute responsibility to the decision maker because the individual does not have control over his or her own self-esteem, which has an effect on what type of decision a person makes.

Throughout this paper I have examined when and if a person can be held morally responsible for their decisions based on various factors; however, is making a decision influenced by whether or not the person finds himself or herself morally responsible? People are considered either incompatibilist or compatibilist based on their beliefs regarding free will and responsibility in a deterministic world. As Woolfolk, Doris and Darley write, incompatibilists believe, "causal determination of behavior is incompatible with moral responsibility. Conversely, compatibilists believe, "moral responsibility and causal determinism can be simultaneously maintained (people can be held responsible even when they could not have done otherwise)" (Knobe & Nichols, 63). In "Do Judgements about Freedom and Responsibilty Depend on Who You Are? Personality Differences in Intuitions about Compatibilism and Incompatibilism" by Feltz and Cokely, we learn that we can predict people's views based on the personality trait of extraversion. Intuitions about freedom and responsibility vary based on how social and outgoing a person is: "those who are high in extraversion are much more likely to judge that a person is free and responsible in a deterministic world than their non-extraverted counterparts, who in some cases express qualitatively different intuitions" (1).

The personality trait of extraversion is similar to the concept of self-esteem in that each individual does not control how extraverted he or she is. They are born

with a genetic predisposition and then friends, family, and environment shape the person. Once again, there is another situation in which personality traits that are uncontrollable by the individual are responsible for the outcome of the intuition or decision. We cannot even conclude if a person should be held morally responsible for believing whether or not people should be held morally responsible even in a nondeterministic world.

Extremely extraverted people who believe that they are morally responsible for their decisions can enter into a state of indecisiveness if they want to do something that they know is wrong. If the person wants to do the "wrong" thing, then he or she might feel extremely conflicted because one knows that it will be his or her fault because he or she believes that he or she is morally responsible. Thus, their belief in moral responsibility can cause indecision.

Overall, people do not enjoy being in a state of indecision. Decisional conflict causes stress because "conflict, indecision, and close-call decisions are associated with a feeling of 'unfreedom,' whereas easy and routinized behavior is associated with a feeling of 'freedom.' (Levy). People would rather have decisional fit, avoid regret, and follow their belief structure while making a decision. Decisions are influenced heavily by personality traits, such as self-esteem and extraversion, and environmental differences, such as who is watching, who the decision is for, and one's upbringing. From the data, we can infer that when one is faced with a conflict within their beliefs, their preferred method of decision, or other clashing feelings, one will enter a state of indecision. Within this state of indecision all of the personality traits and environmental factors will be heavily considered in order to

make a decision. Also, whether a person is in a state of indecision or can decide normally, does not make a difference in whether or not a person should be held morally responsible for their choices.

Based on the above data, people should (in most circumstances) not be held totally morally responsible, even in a nondeterministic universe, because, ultimately, there are too many factors that are outside of an individual's control influencing one's decision. For example, when deciding intuitively what to have for breakfast, a person's decision will be persuaded by factors outside of his or her control, such as what his or her parents served for breakfast while growing up; also, if another person is watching him or her eat, then one might want to pick a healthier option if that choice would make him or her be viewed in a better light. Also, when deciding where to go to college outside factors shape each person and what they find appealing in a school, such as the values that a person's parents instilled in him or her and how important getting a college education is to the family.

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