

Progress Towards Wise Decision-Making

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Abstract

We are offering a practical session in which we will demonstrate the use of the Progress procedure on a decision-making problem offered by a delegate to the conference. If you think you might like to be this person we would be grateful if you could contact us before the practical session. The decision can be either personal or work related, but it should not be one you have already carried out.

The management literature is not short of tools for helping people to make wiser decisions. This paper outlines another tool so it must be asked how can it justify itself given the substantial work that is already done. We suggest that many tools either fail to properly integrate, or simply lack an analysis of (i) showing how emotions help or hinder solving the problem, (ii) the role of creative and critical thinking and (iii), working out what values are at issue in the problem. These three categories can be integrated into a decision-making procedure through an analysis of the stages of decision-making. While the emphasis that is laid on these stages will differ depending upon the problem, we suggest that wise decision-making requires (i) gaining an adequate understanding of the situation, (ii) working out what matters, (iii) generating options, (iv) selecting an option on the basis of what matters and (v) carrying out the option. As practical philosophers we must ask how each of these stages can be adequately carried out, and here we seek to show how philosophy, and other disciplines, can help for the three areas we identify above as lacunas. In looking at the role of emotions we base our analysis on the Aristotelian and Stoic notion that the core of emotions is that they are judgements. This analysis allows us to make sense of both the rationalist view that emotions are a hindrance, and the romantic notion that emotions are a help. Wise decision-making involves unpacking emotions to see what they can reliably tell us about the situation, our values, potential options and how they can motivate us. We suggest ways this task can be achieved. Critical thinking needs to be employed throughout the decision-making procedure so that we fairly and adequately understand the situation and assess potential values and options. We outline some key skills and interventions that can be employed. Critical thinking needs material to work on so we suggest how creative thinking can be used to reframe the situation, and generate potential values and options. The driving force of making a decision is, or at least should be, the values we wish to realise with our decision; what we think matters. Some decisions are purely prudential and here we draw upon ideas of Nozick, Griffin, Aristotle and Epicurus to suggest ways the decision-maker can evaluate their prudential values. For ethical decisions ideas from Mill, Kant and others can help us think through what we wish to achieve. We end with a case study to illustrate how the procedure works in practice

Introduction

At the heart of this paper stand two rather bold claims: that *philosophy* can provide insights and methods of use to the decision-making consultant¹ and that the *Progress* decision-making procedure incorporates these insights and methods. This assertion undoubtedly raises a large number of questions, such as:

- How exactly can philosophy help?
- What empirical evidence do we have for these claims?
- How much philosophy do the consultants have to know in order to use these tools?
- What is wrong with the existing procedures to help with decisions?
- Does this mean throwing away all the valid insights from management literature, psychology and about decision-making?
- Why on earth do we need yet another decision-making procedure?

These are all good questions, and what we say in this paper will have some bearing on most if not all of them. We will however, be focussing on two main questions: - first, how can the insights and methods of philosophy help the decision consultant, and secondly how the *Progress* procedure incorporates these insights and methods. First, we look at the four ways in which philosophy can help a decision consultant. Next, we will show how these are incorporated in a coherent way in the *Progress* procedure. Finally, (in the appendices) we will illustrate how this works in practice with the case study of how Michael was helped to make a wise decision.

How can philosophy help a decision-making consultant?

Were one to explore the skills and knowledge necessary to facilitate wise decision-making, and those that philosophy can provide, the result could undoubtedly be expressed in the form of a Venn diagram. In the 'decision-making' circle there would be some things that have little to do with philosophy, such as having the skills of facilitation, having good communication skills, having knowledge of related disciplines such as psychology and management, and having specific expertise in the area of concern for the decision-maker. In the philosophy circle of the Venn diagram there would be the thinking of people like Descartes and Leibniz on such topics as metaphysics and the mind-body problem, which have little bearing on decision-making². However – and this will be our focus – there would also be an intersection of these two circles indicating the overlap between philosophy and decision-making. There are four categories of insights and methods, which we have learnt to be of key significance to decision-making. These are:

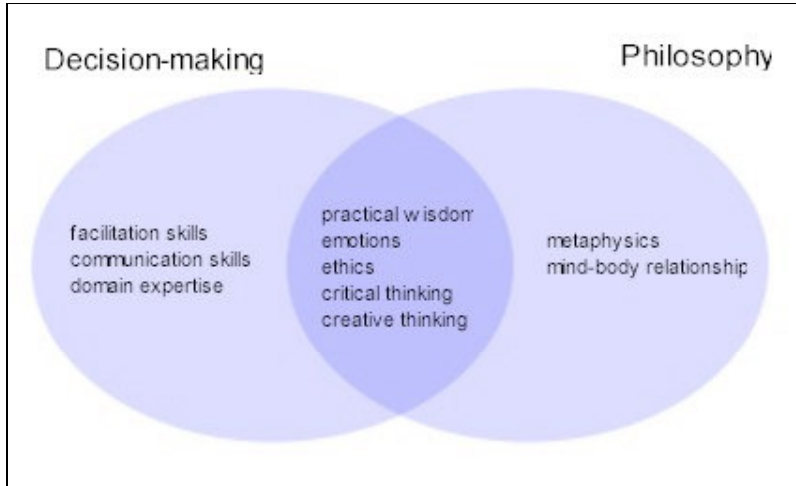
- 1) Aristotle's ideas about practical wisdom;

¹ By decision-making consultant we mean anyone who is hired in a professional role to facilitate someone, or some group, in decision-making. This includes personal counselling, management consultancy, and careers counselling

² We realise that this is a dangerous statement to make, as almost any philosopher can be of relevance. However we have selected those philosophers who we believe are of central relevance to decision-making.

- 2) Nietzsche, Sartre, Aristotle and the Stoics on the emotions;
- 3) Critical and creative thinking;
- 4) The ethics of the good life, and right and wrong.

Figure 1: The relationship between decision-making and philosophy



We will consider these in turn, with a particular eye to their relevance for the decision consultant.

1) Aristotle's Ideas About Practical Wisdom

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle makes a distinction that is of the greatest relevance to the practical philosopher and the decision consultant, that between theoretical and practical wisdom. By **theoretical wisdom** he means knowledge of things that do not change, which in ethics means the general, universal things we can say about what is really right and wrong, and what is living well and living badly. For Aristotle, this would include the statements that *eudemonia* is the ultimate good of man, and that moral virtue is a state of character in which we are disposed to feel things in accordance with the mean (i.e. to feel them in the right way, to the right person, at the right time, for the right reason). Aristotle does not underestimate the need for theoretical wisdom – indeed the *Nicomachean Ethics* itself is (Aristotle would say) an illustration of theoretical wisdom – but theoretical wisdom on its own is not enough to lead a flourishing human life. We also need **practical wisdom**, which for Aristotle means knowing the right thing to do in a particular circumstance through understanding the circumstance rightly, knowing what matters, and effective means-end reasoning to bring about what matters. One can know the right thing to do in general, and what is required, as theoretical wisdom, but this is of little use if one fails to apply this knowledge to this situation.

So, we can see that, developing Aristotle's insights, the person confronted by a decision needs both theoretical wisdom and practical wisdom. The theoretical wisdom will include some things outside philosophy (e.g. such as knowledge of the particular question) but also philosophy (e.g. for decisions with an ethical dimension, ethical

theories). It also includes knowledge of the likely conditions for making a wise decision, which we believe correlate closely to Aristotle's theoretical ideas about practical wisdom. These conditions can be understood as a series of stages in decision-making:

Table 1: The stages in decision-making and their relationship to Aristotelian practical wisdom

Stage of Decision-Making	Aristotelian Practical Wisdom
1 Understanding the situation and decision	Understanding the situation
2 Understanding what matters	Understanding what matters
3 Searching for options	Effective means-end reasoning
4 Choosing the best option	Effective means-end reasoning
5 Implementing the best option	Understanding the situation and effective means-end reasoning

We will consider these in turn.

Stage 1. Understanding the situation and decision

The decision-maker needs to understand the decision being faced, and the situation it is located in, as accurately, fair-mindedly and fully as is reasonable. Without this understanding any attempt to make a decision is likely to be flawed through making errors about what the situation is really like and through not choosing the best problem to work on.

Stage 2. Understanding what matters

The decision-maker needs to understand what really matters in this correctly understood situation – what values are at stake and which are important, and which one's actually are not very important. Aristotle emphasised the archer is more likely to hit the target if they are aware of what that are aiming at. The important values are the target, so without an awareness of what matters the decision-maker does not know what they are aiming at, and have no criterion on which to make the decision.

Stage 3. Searching for options

Even if the decision-maker understands the situation and appreciate what matters, they still need to be aware of the possible options. If they mistakenly think they are limited to two options, when a third option, not thought of, actually would fulfil more of what matters, then they would not have made as wise decision a decision as they could have.

Stage 4. Choosing the best option

Each option needs to be assessed in a logical manner, choosing that option which, given a sound understanding of the situation, satisfies as much as possible of what matters. If we lack the critical powers to assess these options, then we will still fail to make wise decisions.

Stage 5. Implementing the decision

Finally, the decision-maker prepares for implementing the solution, armed with a fallback plan and follow-up activities to check on the implementation. Once the decision-maker has made a selection of the best option, they need to make a final check on it, and work out how to implement and monitor it.

The originality of Progress lies less in these stages themselves than in the way that philosophy informs the content of each step, which translates into *what one actually does at each step*. An overview of how the aspects of philosophy we have identified as relevant to decision-making inform what to do at each stage of the Progress model is presented below.

Element Stage	Emotions	Ethics	Critical Thinking	Creative Thinking
<i>Understanding the situation & decision</i>	Undistorted perception of the situation		Assessing beliefs about the situation	Lateral thinking about the decision; Reframing the problem
<i>Understanding what matters</i>	Indicators of what matters	Ethical theories about what is right; Ethical theories about the good life	Assessing what matters in terms of reasons	Thinking up what matters
<i>Searching for options</i>	Indicator of options			Thinking up options
<i>Choosing the best option</i>			Assessing options in terms of what matters	
<i>Implementing the decision</i>	Overcoming weakness of will; Using emotions to motivate		Thinking up possible setbacks; Assessing effectiveness of decision	Thinking up contingency plans

Table 2: How philosophy is used as a resource at each decision-making stage

We will now explore in turn the ways in which the emotions, creative and critical thinking and ethics can be used to help wise decision-making.

2) Using the Emotions³

Unpacking the emotional core of a decision is, we believe, and will illustrate below, vital. There are various philosophers we have found to be of most use in helping dealing us towards wise decision-making.

From romanticists like Nietzsche we take the idea that the emotions contain their own logic, their own reason; as Nietzsche said, “As if every passion did not have its quantum of reason” (Nietzsche, 1968). A contemporary American philosopher, Joel Kupperman (Kupperman, 1999), has developed this insight by arguing that emotions are very much like a sense which helps us detect value. In particular, he thinks that values can be discerned by asking ourselves who or what we admire and despise. Rather than simply saying we admire what we value, Kupperman asks us first to become aware of what or who we admire and then by analysing this emotion work out what it is we, perhaps implicitly, value. We could go further than Kupperman and suggest that other emotions, such as envy and anger, may also indicate what is of value. In his book, *The Consolations of Philosophy*, Alain de Botton (2000) describes how Raphael used envy of the great masters to help him become a great artist. Raphael's envy told him two things; first, that he valued the works of the great masters, and second that he could become a better painter himself by incorporating their techniques into his own work. In terms of the stages of decision-making analysed above Raphael's envy provided him with insight into what mattered to him, and an option for pursuing what he valued.

From rationalists like Sartre⁴ (1997) we take the idea that emotions, although they have their own logic, are not necessarily reliable. Indeed, not only are they often motivated by our needs, but they also distort our picture of the world. In Sartre's memorable phrase, emotions are ‘magical transformations of the world’. Like Aesop's fox who reinterpreted the desired, but out of reach, grapes as sour, our emotions help us to perceive the world to be more as we would like it, perhaps as a way of boosting our self-esteem. At a meeting, a colleague suggests you have made a mistake, or criticises a pet idea of yours. Rather than admit the possibility that they may be right, you get angry, which ‘magically transforms’ the situation into one in which they are the one who has made a mistake, or failed to think clearly. In decision-making, unless we reduce emotional distortions of this sort, we have little chance of perceiving the situation, or what matters, or options fairly.

Sartre and Nietzsche might seem to be saying incompatible things; Sartre that emotions distort, but Nietzsche that emotions provide us with valuable information. How can they do both? These views can be accommodated if we take seriously a third view about the emotions, from Aristotle and the Stoics, that emotions have a cognitive component. As Chrysippus, an early Stoic, argued each emotion consists of at least two judgements; one that something good or bad is at hand, the other about an appropriate way to react. (Sorabji, 2000). The person suddenly confronted by a bear who feels panic is implicitly judging that something bad is at hand (physical harm), and that the appropriate way to react is to fight or flee. Similar analyses are available

³ See Arnaud, D & LeBon, T (2000) for a fuller discussion of the role of emotions in decision-making

⁴ Sartre may not be the first philosopher who springs to mind when the word ‘rationalist’ is mentioned. However, in view of his grave suspicion of the emotions, we think that in this context this label is justified.

for the manager suddenly confronted by what they judge to be a hostile situation. Whilst emotions undoubtedly also have physiological, feeling and action-tendency components, at their heart also lies these two judgements; one about the personal significance of some event, and another about the appropriate way to react to it.

Given the cognitive content of the emotion we can see that emotional wisdom lies in making sound judgements about the significance of an event, and an appropriate reaction to it. As Aristotle said in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, concerning the appropriate experience of anger: "The mild-mannered man ... is provoked only in that way and at those matters and for that much time as the situation dictates" (Book II.9). Given this analysis we can see that Kupperman and de Botton's suggestions are plausible, and that emotions can provide us with insight into understanding a situation, values and options, but only when the emotion is a soundly based. And we can see that Sartre is right that emotions can distort our perception of these areas when the cognitive judgements within the emotion are themselves distortions.

For decision-making, the lessons are clear. First, we must not ignore the emotions – else we risk both missing out their informational value and allowing them to distort our view of the situation, the problem, what matters, our options and our ability to implement the decision. But how can we best use the emotions? How can we climb the ladders and avoid the snakes of emotions? Aristotle believed that developing the ability to feel the right emotion at the right time and in the right way was the work and achievement of a lifetime, and so it is. While recognising this, the decision-making consultant can help in a number of ways, both in dealing with the particular decision being faced and as part of an Aristotelian education in emotional wisdom. First, we need to ask the decision-maker(s) about their emotions. What do they feel – is it anger, anxiety, excitement, or being overwhelmed? Next, we need to question them what this emotion is *about*. If they are angry what is this anger directed towards, if they are feeling overwhelmed what about the problem seems overwhelming to them, if they are excited what about the decision excites them. Thirdly, we need to ask – and here the greatest skill and tack is required - whether, on reflection, this emotion is appropriate. Is the emotion based upon a sound grasp of the situation?; is it free from Sartrean distortions?; does it relate to what is really of value?; does it hit the Aristotelian mean of being felt to the right degree? Fourthly, we need to ask what information the emotions are providing us with and fifthly we need to ask, bearing in mind whether the emotion is appropriately or inappropriately felt, what the emotion implies we should do.

3) Using Creative and Critical Thinking⁵

Creative Thinking

Creative thinking is the generation of thoughts, ideas, decisions and actions, often by novel and unexpected means. Such thinking is useful at different stages in the process of decision-making⁶.

⁵ See LeBon, T and Arnaud, D (2001) for a fuller discussion of the role of creative and critical thinking in decision-making.

⁶ While philosophers have contributed a little to this many other writers have provided a number of useful tools.

How the situation is framed can be crucially important to determining how the decision-maker proceeds. Lateral thinking is Edward de Bono's name for a special type of creative thinking, which involves 'pattern-switching within a patterning system' (de Bono, 1982, p.55) as a way to get a fresh perspective on understanding the problem being faced.

Weston (1997) shows how this can be applied to classic dilemmas, such as those of Heinz (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 12) and Sartre's student (Sartre, 1989, p35), to 'find the best problem'.⁷ In Kohlberg's dilemma Heinz is presented as facing a situation in which he must choose between breaking the law and stealing an expensive but vital drug, or watching his wife die without the drug. But, asks Weston, should we really think of decisions as so easily categorised into these kinds of dilemmas. What is needed is to reframe the problem from being an either-or dilemma and rather seek to find ways to help the wife without breaking the law, by for instance threatening the drug owner with adverse publicity for the high price of the drug. Similarly, Sartre's student's problem is posed as an ultimate choice between helping his mother and fighting for the Free French; why, asks Weston, should we be restricted to these two choices? Is the mother really as helpless as the student thinks? If not, the answer may lie in helping her realise her own resources.⁸

The ubiquitous brainstorming (Osborn, 1953) can be helpful to generate both potential values and potential options. Following Aristotle's suggestion that the archer is most likely to hit the target when they know what the target is (Book 1.3), potential values should be brainstormed once a reasonable understanding of the situation and problem has been achieved, and options brainstormed once the potential values have been assessed for their importance.

Strong potential options can also be generated by, as Covey reminds us (Covey, 1992), thinking win/win. While Covey advocates win/win thinking between people – and avoiding win/lose, or compromise, in cases of potential conflict between these people - it can also be applied within a person. Here the goal is to find an option, which does not just satisfy what the person thinks is most important but rather satisfies as much of what the person think is matters as possible. Win/win thinking shows why it is important to assess values before generating options. Once we know what we want to achieve we can try to create or modify options appropriately. The reader might note an overlap here with finding the best problem, as Weston is suggesting reframing a supposed dilemma to allow the satisfaction of the seemingly incompatible values - saving the life of his wife and not breaking the law in the case of the Heinz problem.

Critical Thinking

Robert Ennis has defined critical thinking as 'a process, the goal of which is to make reasonable decisions about what to believe and what to do.'⁹ (1996, p xvii). Ennis has emphasised that critical thinking involves both a set of skills and a set of

7 The expression is Weston's (Weston, 1997).

8 If the problem cannot be reframed in quite such a dramatic way, lateral thinking encourages the restating of the problem in terms of 'how to' rather than 'whether' .

9 In practice critical thinking has focused more on what to believe than what to do, because we would suggest deciding what to do requires more than critical thinking – what this more requires is part of what this article seeks to elucidate.

attitudes, an echo of Aristotle's view that practical wisdom requires both intellectual and moral virtues. The possession of skills that enable us to think clearly without the attitudes of caring about being fair and unbiased, and being willing to challenge our beliefs as well as defend them are skills that have limited value¹⁰. The decision consultant's role is not just to help the client to think skilfully, but also to care about how their thinking is being used. Developing the appropriate set of attitudes needed for effective critical thinking is hard because we are naturally drawn to interpreting the world through a somewhat hardened set of categories. One way to break through these categories, and encourage the openness required, is to try to see the world as others do. To facilitate this process the decision consultant can ask the client to imagine what others might say, whether they are real or an imaginary devil's advocate or sympathetic critic.

Critical thinking needs to be applied throughout the decision making process, in gaining an accurate understanding the situation, in assessing values, in assessing options and in carrying out and monitoring the chosen option.

The critical thinking literature has tended to present two different ideas about what critical thinking entails, which can be termed the 'fallacies' and the 'good reasons' approach. An appreciation of both can be useful in the decision consultant's role in helping people make wise decisions.

The Fallacies Approach

The fallacies approach to critical thinking seeks to categorise the errors in thinking that lead people to mistaken conclusions, with the expectation that if people are forewarned about how their thinking is likely to go wrong, they are forearmed by being more likely to spot, and correct, fallacies when they occur. This categorisation of thinking errors has been pursued by both philosophers and psychologists and has resulted in the generation of (long) lists of fallacies. Such as approach is exemplified in Nigel Warburton's *Thinking From A to Z* (1996) and Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa's *Smart Choices* (1999)¹¹. Fallacies listed by Warburton, and suggestions for how the decision consultant can help to deal with the fallacy, include:

Fallacy	Explanation	Remedy
Ad hominem	Attacking the person rather than the relevant argument.	Don't focus on who said what, but rather what was said. Analyse emotions involved.
Affirming the consequent	An argument of the invalid form 'if p then q; q; therefore p'.	Illustrate the fallacy, and why it's a problem. An education in logic!
Bad company fallacy	Attacking something simply because it has been held by someone evil or stupid.	Don't focus on who said what, but rather what was said. Analyse emotions involved.
Rash generalisation	A statement based on insufficient evidence.	Seek to prevent a rush to a solution. Ask for possible counter

¹⁰ The extent to which we care about our thinking is partly determined by the emotional wisdom we elucidated above.

¹¹ Neither of these books is simply a list of fallacies – both have far more to say about thinking

		evidence and counter arguments.
Straw man	Caricaturing an opponent's view to make it seem more implausible than it really is.	Seek for all positions to be presented all as fairly as possible, by, for instance, asking the decision-maker to put themselves in their opponents' shoes. Analyse emotions involved.

Table 3: Some of the fallacies listed in Warburton's Thinking From A to Z and remedies.

Hammond et al (1999) call their list of fallacies 'decision traps'. Some of these and suggestions for how the decision consultant can help to deal with them, include:

Trap	Explanation	Remedy
Sunk costs	Protecting earlier choices, even when they are no longer valid	Ask whether this current choice would be made, given where we are, if earlier ones had not. Analyse emotions involved.
Confirming evidence	Seeing what you want to see	Ask for possible counter evidence and counter arguments. Imagine what other parties might say. Analyse emotions involved.
Framing	Posing the wrong question	Reframe the problem using lateral thinking.
Anchoring	Over-relying on first thoughts	See the situation from the perspective of others (who have different first thoughts).
Recallability	Focussing on easily remembered information	Encourage a wide search for arguments and evidence.

Table 4: Some of the decision traps listed in Hammond et al and remedies .

Basing wise decision-making on the fallacies approach involves identifying fallacies in the reasoning behind a decision. While such an approach is useful to the extent that it really does enable people to recognise and avoid fallacies it also has these three limitations:

- i) A listing of fallacies is non-exhaustive; there are a potentially unlimited number of ways it is possible to reason wrongly, so no list of fallacies will ever catch all these errors. Nevertheless becoming aware of the most common is no doubt very beneficial, and an educative role of the decision consultant is to increase the client's understanding of an increasing number of these. While everyone has their own favourites, we have found the most common is to mistake the vividness with which something strikes us, as a measure of its importance.
- ii) The fallacies approach provides no account of what makes for a good reason; it only specifies what a bad reason is. This would be all right providing every decision

which involves no fallacies is wise and every decision that does involve fallacies is unwise. But neither is the case. I might decide to buy an ice-cream, believing it to be pleasant, only to find it not to my taste – a poor decision, as it turns out, but not one that was poor because I committed a fallacy of reasoning. Or I might rush into making a decision, committing rash generalisations and pursuing sunk costs, and nevertheless make a good decision. Indeed this error in reasoning - that a belief based upon fallacious reasoning must be wrong - is so common it has been given its own name; the ‘fallacy fallacy’. The ‘fallacy fallacy’ is a fallacy because it does not follow that a belief is wrong because the reasons offered to support it are wrong – after all there might be other, non-fallacious, reasons which do support the belief.

iii) A focus on fallacy spotting, and the attendant desire to shout ‘fallacy’ (or ‘decision trap’) wherever possible, can easily degenerate into failing to appreciate the context required to determine whether something really is a fallacy.

The good reasoning approach

Here the approach is not based upon listing, spotting and remedying fallacies but rather specifying what good reasoning involves, and trying to match one’s own reasoning to this ideal.¹² The good reasons approach provides a normative account of what reasoning well involves, and hence provides an account of what makes a fallacy a fallacy. For example a rash generalisation is a fallacy because such a generalisation fails to conform to how inductive generalisations should be reached, through an appropriately wide sampling of the relevant evidence. This approach provides a useful corrective to the limitations outlined in the reliance upon fallacy spotting because:

- i) an exhaustive, and hence infinite, check list of potential fallacies is not required to test whether our reasoning is good – rather the decision-maker needs to understand and apply the requirements of good reasoning (not a small task in itself of course);
- ii) an account of what makes a decision a good decision can be supplied that needn’t rely upon the presence or absence of fallacies;
- iii) the context of the alleged fallacy can be investigated, and hence whether it is really a fallacy explicated.

As suggested above mastering, let alone applying, the skills of good reasoning is no small task. The range of skills that are needed can be indicated by listing only some that Ennis explains in his textbook on the subject (1996)¹³.

SKILL	THE RANGE OF THE SKILL
Identifying conclusions and reasons	The minimal requirement for assessing arguments is identifying reasons and conclusions
Assessing the credibility of sources	On what grounds should we believe what someone says
Assessing observation statements	On what grounds should we believe what we, or others, think we/they see
Deduction	When does a conclusion validly follow from premises

¹² For examples of books which take the good reasoning approach to critical thinking see Govier, T. (1985) and Thomson, A. (1999).

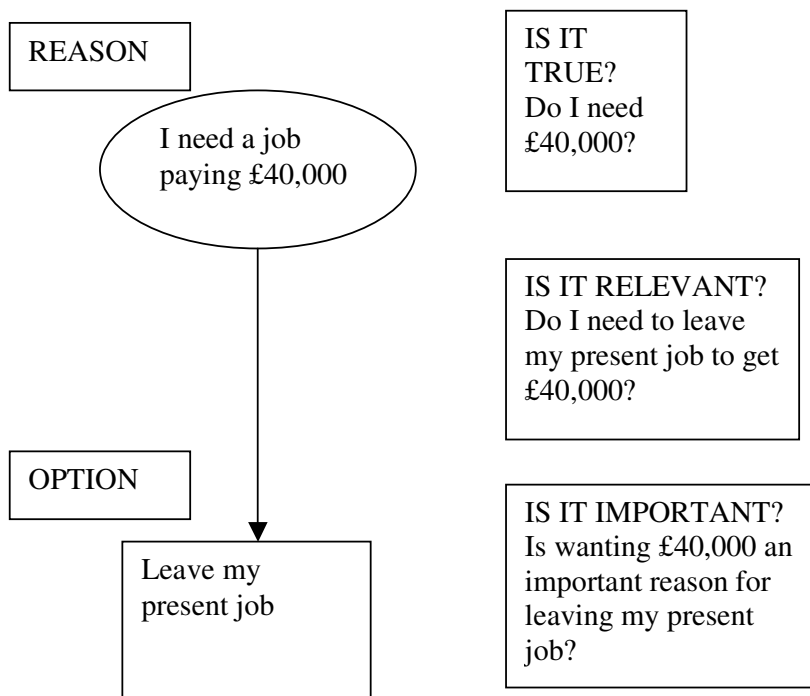
¹³ Ennis also illustrates the applicability of these skills to his role as a juror deciding the guilt or innocence of an accused person

Causal inference	When are we justified in claiming that something caused something else to happen
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While we believe that mastering these skills, and helping one's clients to acquire them, are valuable tasks a technique that we have found useful is for the decision consultant to keep three key questions in mind. These three questions are: 'Is it true?'; 'Is it relevant?'; and 'Is it important?'. These questions are useful because they map onto the structure of real-world decision-making. When we are making a decision we invariably have a range of options and different reasons which we believe support these options. For each reason we can ask:

- i) Is this reason true? Here the goal is to burrow upwards by asking what grounds there are for believing the reason offered in support an option;
- ii) Is this reason relevant? Here the goal is to determine whether the reason supports one or more options;
- iii) Is it important? Here the goal is to determine how important this reason within the context of other reasons both pro and con.

A simple illustration of how these questions work is presented below:



4) Using Insights From Ethics

Ethics contributes primarily to working out what matters, and here, of course, there are many philosophical insights to draw from, which can help. When making decisions that are mainly of a prudential nature, we can draw on ideas from thinkers like Nozick and Griffin about states of mind and states of the world, Aristotle about character and Epicurus about evaluating desires. In considering the ethical dimensions of a decision, we can in addition learn from Mill and the utilitarians about considering the interests of other parties, the deontologists about their rights and our corresponding duties, and Kant about what should happen, regardless of the role we have in the decision.

Nozick and Griffin on states of mind and states of the world

Narrow hedonists think that just one particular state of mind –pleasure – matters. The late Robert Nozick’s thought experiment about the Experience Machine (Nozick, 1974), makes this narrow theory less plausible. Nozick asks us to consider the possibility of being plugged in to a machine that will reliably make us think we are having greatly desired experiences. A hedonist would feel ecstatic pleasure, more achievement-minded people would perhaps see other people recognising all their talents. Nozick asks us if we would agree to be plugged in to the machine, for the rest of our lives. Most people shrink back at this ‘opportunity’. Why? Because, argues Nozick, the *state of the world* when we are plugged in is not what we would like it to be. We think our achievements are being recognised or that we are drinking a fine wine, whereas in fact we are just plugged in to a machine in a laboratory. James Griffin (1986) suggests that our conclusion should *not be* that states of mind do not matter, but that states of the world matter *as well as* states of mind. In general, people do think that their experiences matter; but what also matters is the relationship of their experiences to reality, and things that are happening in the world outside their experiences.

These insights are of direct relevance to the decision-making consultant when they are helping the decision-maker to think about what matters in a specific situation. The decision-maker will normally be asked first to list the things that seem to matter in the situation. For example, someone thinking of changing jobs might start off by saying ‘money, enjoyment and lack of stress’ are the things that matter. The decision-making consultant will mentally note that this list is a very ‘state of mind’ oriented list. Rather than saying this directly, which might lead to a rather defensive reaction, the skilled consultant would ask the decision-maker to consider the following questions about their objectives:

- a) What do you want to happen regarding what you are feeling and thinking?
- b) What do you want to happen regarding the difference you are making to the world?

The second question may well bring out other things the decision-maker regards as important – they may add that they would like their new job to be of some positive benefit. Note that this intervention could work in the other direction, and lead to the decision-maker being more aware of values connected with states of mind. These questions can also, of course, be viewed as aiding creative thinking, by offering categories that allows the client to think up additional things that matter.

Aristotle about character

The ideas of virtue ethics, including Aristotle's ideas about character, can also usefully be brought in to the decision-making process. Simply asking the client 'What sort of person would you like to be in this situation?' is often fruitful. Sometimes clarification is required about what this means, in which case one offers a choice of character-related adjectives. So you might say to the career changer: 'Well, for instance you might say that being pro-active is important, or being courageous, or perhaps for some people being caring might matter.'

Epicurean therapy of desire

Epicurus proposed a sort of therapy of desire:- "The following method of inquiry must be applied to every desire. What will happen to me if what I long is accomplished. What will happen if it is not accomplished?" (Inwood, B & Gerson, L.P. (ed), 1994) Whilst two questions above, on states of mind and states of the world, are examples of creative thinking (tending to add additional things that might matter) this intervention is critical; it will tend to lead the client to decide that some things don't matter as much as they thought, or even don't matter at all. A useful way of posing this question is to ask 'Looking ahead in five or 10 years, what do you think might be important about this decision?'. This will tend to separate out those things that are merely short-term considerations (such as being able to afford a nice holiday this year) with things that are of more long-term significance (such as having a long-term career path).

Epicurus's question can also be adapted to make a useful distinction between things that are desired as ends in themselves, and things that are desired only as a means to other ends. The point here is that if something is desired only as a means to other things, then it's important to identify that other thing, because whilst one's ability to get this thing may be blocked, there may be other ways of getting the other thing. For example, our career chooser may begin by saying 'My new job must be located within ten minutes of Waterloo station'. Such a requirement would be rather restrictive, to say the least, so it would be worth asking why this was important. It might transpire that what they really want is to have a total journey time of less than 2 hours total travelling door to door each day. Again, it would be worth asking why they wanted this. Answers might relate to wanting to have more time with their children, and not being too tired. These could probably have been arrived at by asking Epicurus's question, or alternatively by probing, where appropriate 'Why exactly is that important' and 'What would that lead to that matters to you' and replacing the original means-related value with the more ultimate end-related value.

Sometimes clients frame a decision specifically as an ethical dilemma (such as 'Should I blow the whistle on my company's unethical policies?'), and at other times it will become clear that a dilemma has an ethical dimension that the client may wish to consider (such as 'Should I give up my highly paid job to do something more satisfying and useful'). In these cases, it's useful for the decision consultant to have the option of drawing on ethical theories *in addition* to the more prudentially-minded theories we have already considered.

Mill, and utilitarians, on other parties and interests

The first set of thinkers that can help are the utilitarians, and their ideas about consequences and other parties. We can usefully ask the client to list the other parties affected by their decision and what their interests are. For example, the prospective whistleblower would list the people who are adversely affected by the unethical policies; they would also list their families, who might lose out because of financial insecurities.

Kant and deontologists on rights and duties

Whilst the utilitarians alert us to the interests of other parties, deontologists remind us that, regardless of the consequences, there might be some rights that other people have in this situation, and corresponding to these rights, duties on our parts. The whistleblower might suggest that his family has a right to financial support leading to a corresponding duty on his part to not endanger his job. We can also use the specifically Kantian categorical imperative to help the client take an ethical stance, by asking 'Looking at all the parties involved in this decision, and forgetting the specific role you have, what seems to matter to you about this situation.'

We believe that offering these five perspectives provides a rich range of options for the client about what might matter in this situation. Of course, not all of them will be relevant to every situation, and not all clients will find every perspective congruent with their own ethical views. It is important therefore that the decision consultant chooses which of these seem relevant, and offers each tentatively as something the client may want to consider, rather than dogmatically insisting upon a viewpoint. On the other hand, the consultant should not accept the answers given as final; the tools of critical thinking, and the Epicurean and Kantian questions, are particularly useful ways of checking that the client is considering long-term consequences and other parties. For major prudential decisions (such as a career change) we would recommend that the decision consultant switches to being a 'values consultant' to allow the client to focus specifically on what for them makes life go well. In this case, a procedure such as RSVP (LeBon, 2001) can prove a useful complementary tool to Progress.

Conclusions

We believe we have now answered satisfactorily the question of how philosophy provides a useful resource for the decision-maker. It does this in a number of ways, including through analyses of the emotions, ethics and practical wisdom and the methods of creative and critical thinking. *Progress* integrates these into a 5 stage procedure (see appendix 2 for a template of the procedure) that can be used by the decision-making consultant to help facilitate wise decisions. The case study of Michael (see appendix 1) illustrates how this works in practice. This, and the other case examples of *Progress* in use, do not of course constitute conclusive empirical evidence for its effectiveness. We hope to have said enough, however, to suggest that it is worthy of attention to those interested in helping make wise decisions.

Progress Towards Wise Decision-Making
Tim LeBon & David Arnaud

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

How PROGRESS works in practice : Michael's Case¹⁴

Michael wanted help with a rather unusual decision - what to do with a large amount of money that was likely to be coming his way soon.

STAGE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION AND DECISION

i) Michael's situation in headlines

SITUATION IN HEADLINES
I work as a business consultant helping to create companies.
At the beginning of my career I was involved in the creation of the company that I knew would grow rapidly and would make a great deal of money. I was offered a 10% share in the company but rejected this as I did not want the money that this would bring as it would disrupt my life pattern.
I realise that having a lot of money is not important to me, as I did not mind not getting money from the shares.
The three other creators of the company went on to make a lot of money. Their financial success has had a negative impact on both of their lives, as they have not been able to repeat the success financially, and one of the three has even taken over companies and turned them from success to disaster. The wealth has also negatively affected their personal lives as they have become alienated from the friends and relatives. Marriages have even been destroyed.
When I work I am asked to take a small share in companies I help create. Several companies that I have a small share in are likely to be floated on the stock market soon.
I have a 1% share in one company that is likely to float for about £200 million making me a millionaire – completely outside my control.

ii) Michael's Emotions

Michael was worried about the money that was coming his way and the changes that it would bring. Though not someone who is normally anxious, he felt this anxiety very strongly. He was unable to locate where this anxiety precisely lay. He suggested that it might be to do with factors such as the responsibility that came with so much money and using it well, the possibility of his life pattern (of a wife and friends, and doing a job he enjoyed) being disrupted and with being seen differently by people around him. Part of the problem surrounding this issue was Michael's view of himself

¹⁴ Some identifying details have been changed to preserve the privacy of 'Michael'.

as someone who is ethical and not driven by money and traditionally ‘capitalist’ considerations and the possibility that he would become a millionaire - how would he and other people view this possible contradiction?

ii) Michael’s Options: initial thoughts

Although anxious, or perhaps because he was anxious, he had put off thinking much about what to do. He did tentatively suggest the options of giving away the shares before he received the money, or waiting for the shares to realise and investing some of the money in a pension, and putting some in a charitable trust. He was concerned that while giving the money away might do some good, it was also a way for him to avoid the issue of what to do with the money - even if he gave it away somebody would have to decide what to do with it, and he wanted to make sure the money was put to good use. So for Michael none of the initial options were entirely satisfactory.

Expanding the Understanding of the Situation:

As we investigated Michael’s problem it became clear that there was more to the situation than was immediately apparent. Michael had been writing a book, on and off for the last fifteen years, on the spirituality of economics. This book was a critique of the purely capitalist foundations of economics and he offered instead the view that economics should be based around the community and the whole person. Although central to Michael’s views about the world, he had put off finishing this book. This was because of the need to sacrifice his work of starting companies in order to write the book and also a fear of how the publication of this book might - like the money - lead to changes in his life pattern. Michael stated that it was hard for him to do something for himself as he tended to do things only if they were for someone else. Because of this it was hard for him to make the time needed for the writing. He was also anxious that the book, if it became well known, might undermine his work with his clients as they might see him as not capitalist enough, and that it could lead to him being taken up on a lecture circuit and again his life being disrupted.

STAGE 2: UNDERSTANDING WHAT MATTERS

In order to get clearer on what would be a wise decision for Michael we investigated what he valued connected to the decision he was facing. We identified these values and Michael gave them these weights (out of 10):

Michael’s Values:

VALUE	WEIGHT
Not being thought by self or others as hypocritical/ challenged about own ethical conduct	10
Duty to do something constructive with the money	10
Acting within your own competence	10
Preserving current lifestyle and relationships	10
Provide opportunities to others	10
Duty to write the book	10
Not harming others (especially through financial	9

mismanagement)	
Doing current work (accountancy/ starting companies)	8
Knowing what you are trying to achieve/ knowing who you are	8
Financial responsibility to family (to provide security)	7 or 8
Doing things for self (as we saw above Michael needed something to be a duty to others before he would do it – hence the low score)	3
Having more money than I need	2

Michael's analysis of these values went to considerably reduce his anxiety about what the affects of getting the money could be. In fact many of these values were uncovered through Michael's analysis of what had gone wrong in the lives of his three former partners who had become millionaires. These partners had not done anything constructive with the money they had realised, as they did not know who they were and what they were trying to achieve, they did not act within their competence and consequently they had harmed others through their financial mismanagement, and furthermore they damaged their relationships and current lifestyle.

This analysis of the experience of his former partners, and how their lives had been negatively impacted through their failure to live according to the sort of values that Michael had identified as important, showed Michael that he had less to fear from the wealth than was suggested by his previous levels of anxiety.

STAGE 3: SEARCHING FOR OPTIONS

We then generated possible options for Michael coming up with these ideas:

Michael's Options:

OPTIONS
Using the money to get time to write book
Putting the money in a pension fund
Giving to a charity/ charities
Setting up a foundation to promote his economic ideas
Financing a chair in economics to promote his economic ideas
Investing the money ethically (for instance in micro-credit, social housing and so on)
Continuing to work as currently

STAGE 4: CHOOSING THE BEST OPTION

In analysing these options it became clear that one of things worrying Michael was that he would become swamped by the demands of sorting out the use of the money in any organizations that might be set up. However it also became clear that Michael very much enjoyed working as a team player and was happy to devolve responsibility to others. This being so many of these options could be pursued without Michael being solely in charge, and another source of anxiety was reduced.

Given that Michael would not need to be in complete control of whatever he set up it also became clear that these options were not mutually exclusive. Michael rejected the possibility of setting up a chair as 'not really him' and was drawn towards trying to finish writing his book and then, if this took off, setting up a foundation. Meanwhile he thought he would invest the money ethically, as this would provide a good use for it and also keep it available should he get into the position of setting up the foundation. He would continue working as he presently does and invest some for a pension.

In the analysis it seemed that Michael had produced a potential win-win option that would capture much of what he valued. Now it was time to test whether this option really was in accordance with his values

Michael's option tested against his values:

(A value fully satisfied is indicated by a '5', not satisfied by a '0', while a '?' indicates uncertainty over whether the value will be satisfied. Under this mark is an explanation of why this value will, or will not, be satisfied by the option)

ASSESSING THE MOST PROMISING OPTION	
Writing book, investing money ethically, setting up foundation, continuing to do same work as presently, investing some in a pension fund	
VALUE	SATISFIED? (and comment)
Not being thought by self or others as hypocritical/ challenged about own ethical conduct	2 - Not sure how self and others view both challenging and using the economic system
Duty to do something constructive with the money	5 - These options are a wise constructive use of the money
Acting within your own competence	5 - I am very good at setting things going its my job after all and would be competent at these things
Preserving current lifestyle and relationships	5 and 2 - My life with my wife will not change but there is some doubt about how this might affect relationships with friends
Provide Opportunities to Others	5 - The ethical investment will provide opportunities to others, as will the book and foundation
Duty to Write the Book	5 - I'm writing the book!
Not harming others (especially through financial mismanagement)	5 - As above for acting within competence
Not having more money than I need	5 - I will be using most of the money on a variety of useful projects rather than keeping it for my personal use
Doing current work (accountancy/ starting companies)	4 - My pattern of work is likely to change, at least to some extent, in the future. But writing the book is not likely to lead to my not being employed to set up companies as many people setting up companies might well share my views about what is valuable. Anyway I will still be recognised as good at it.
Knowing what you are trying to achieve/ knowing who you are	4 - These options are part of who I am, and what I want to achieve

Financial responsibility to family (to provide security)	4 - As some of the money will be invested in a pension fund and I will continue to work anyway
Doing things for self (as we saw above Michael needed something to be a duty to others before he would do it - hence the low score)	2 - In a sense writing the book is doing something for self, but doing things for self is given a very low priority

Checking this option against the values showed that this option captured much of what Michael saw as important in his life. However a couple of the values were recorded with question marks by them. These were areas that Michael resolved that he would prepare himself for over the coming weeks and months. This is how he saw it: Michael had partly put off doing more on the book because he tended to work when he saw himself as having a duty to work, which was when he was contracted by people to help them to set up their companies. While he did believe he had a duty to write the book he also found it difficult to allow himself the time to do this. Michael resolved at the end of the session to work to give his own projects a higher value, and even decided that if the company was not floated on the stock market he would try to find more time to devote to the book for, as he pointed out, many people wrote books in more difficult circumstances.

Another remaining area of worry was how the money might lead to changes in relationships with friends. Michael thought that on reflection this might not be too much of a problem with the friends that he and his wife had but he would also prepare himself for possible difficulties.

The final remaining area of worry was how he and others would view him as both criticising the economic system and benefiting from it. Michael decided that he would put some work into trying to reconcile his views about this.

Michael's anxiety dissolved as he clarified his values and future:

At the end of the session Michael's anxiety about the changes to his life that the money would bring were reduced, and he had become much more committed to writing a book that he thought might have a chance to change the world for the better. Michael said that he found himself much better able to prepare for the future as he had now become aware of the sorts of factors that might change in his life, and he had ideas for how he wanted to manage these changes. In broadening his view of the problem facing him, working out the values that he wanted to live by, and finding options to realise these values, he had come to see that he could work to avoid the negative consequences that happened to his former partners and instead aim to devote more time to realising his worthwhile projects and making good use of the money. By making wise use of the good fortune that would come his way Michael would have a chance to make a significant impact on changing the world for the better.

APPENDIX 2:

PROGRESS – A five stage decision procedure

The resulting decision-procedure – PROGRESS – is given below. It should be emphasised that neither all questions here will be asked a decision-maker in every situation, nor will the questions be limited to these. Furthermore, the appropriate skills of tact, discretion and good listening - as well as assertiveness, logical acumen and philosophical awareness – are required in the decision-making consultant.

1) UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION AND THE DECISION

a) Initial overview

i) What is the decision you would like to work on?

ii) Name some options that you've already thought of.

iii) Jot down your situation in the style of a number of 'headlines', expanding on each in a sentence or two if you think this would be helpful.

b) Working on your emotions

i) What do you think and feel about the situation? For example, do you feel anxious, or angry, or overwhelmed?

ii) Try to identify what each emotion is about, and also how strongly you feel the emotion. For example, someone considering a career change might feel a lot of excitement about being free to explore new projects, but also some anxiety about being in a new environment.

iii) Say a bit more about some of the thoughts that go with each emotion – the reasons why you are angry or excited.

iv) Examining what you have said in iii), reflect on whether this emotion is telling you something important – perhaps something that really matters about the situation, or whether it may be an inappropriate response, or perhaps an overreaction.

c) Taking stock of the situation

i) Do you now want to add anything to your 'headline' account of the situation?

ii) What is the decision you would most like to work on now? Bear in mind that the phrasing might be important – for example it might be more fruitful to ask 'How can I best satisfy my long-term career plans' than 'Should I accept this job I have been offered?'.

2) UNDERSTANDING WHAT MATTERS

i) Initial thoughts

Begin by jotting down some of objectives and values you would like to see satisfied by the decision (for example, feeling less stressed)

ii) Creatively thinking up other things that matter

- a) What would you like to happen regarding what you are thinking and feeling?
- b) What would you like to happen regarding the difference you are making in the world?
- c) What do you think a good and well-informed friend would advise you ?
- d) What do you advise a good friend placed in a similar position?
- e) What sort of person would you like to be in this situation ?
- f) What additional values and objectives are implied by all these answers?

iii) Thinking about the other parties involved

- a) Write down the names of other parties involved, and their interests and rights relating to this situation.
- b) Does this list suggest other things that matter to you in this situation (for example duties you might have, or objectives you might consider)

iv) Thinking more about what really matters most

We now have a fairly long list of things that seem to matter in this situation. Here are some more questions designed to help decide which of these things really matter most.

- a) Looking ahead in five or 10 years, what do you think might be important about this decision?
- b) Why is everything you have identified on this list important? Keep asking 'why do I want that' until you come to the most fundamental things that are important, and retain only these on your list of what matters.
- c) Based on a) and b), now write down some of the things that now appear to matter most , and rate them from 5 (most important) to 0 (least important)

3) SEARCHING FOR OPTIONS

- a) Looking at the options you wrote down in stage 1, and what matters most from stage 2, start to brainstorm possible solutions. At this stage, don't veto options on grounds of quality, just say aloud and write down ideas that spring to mind. Then write down some of the ideas that seem most promising.

4) CHOOSING THE BEST OPTION

Options	Objective 1	Objective 2	Objective 3	Objective 4
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

5) IMPLEMENTING THE DECISION.

- i) What follow-up activities would help this solution work ?
- ii) What obstacles might there be to implementing this solution?
- iii) How can these be overcome?
- iv) What emotions do you feel about the solution. Does this suggest further obstacles or motivators?
- v) Monitor how you are doing – report back in an agreed time period.