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Comment

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I agree completely with Shafer that a coherent normative system of choice must be compatible with a realistic description of how people choose. “Ought” implies “is.” We do not recommend the impossible. But the observation that certain particular choices may be in conflict with a set of normative decision making principles (or ethical ones) does not lead us to abandon these principles automatically; to do so would be to identify the “ought” and the “is.” Instead, we look at the world of conflicting—and often confusing and incoherent—choice to determine whether there are empirical patterns consistent with the normative system we propose. I believe that by a rather selective choice of example Shafer has managed to obscure these empirical regularities; in particular, by treating choosing individuals as if they were “of one mind” about their decisions and decision making process, he has ignored the degree to which we *do* seek to make “policy choices,” the degree to which we experience conflict and attempt to resolve it by subordinating isolated desires and modes of thought to more general ones, and, most importantly, the empirically demonstrable degree to which we achieve our broad goals when we in fact succeed in making these policy

judgments, which he questions. I have five basic disagreements with his characterization of our decision making behavior.

1. In Section 2.3 Shafer writes: “It is almost always more sensible to construct preferences from judgments of probability and value than to try to work backward from choices between hypothetical acts to judgment of probability and value.” I agree. But why is that “sensible?” His advice is sensible due to the *empirical* findings (Dawes, 1979) that expert and nonexpert predictions made in that “decomposed” manner are superior to those made *wholistically*. And because preference is in part a prediction (of one’s future state of mind), then it is reasonable to suppose (Dawes, 1986) that preference judgments made in this manner will be superior as well—as a general rule, certainly subject to exceptions.

But the success of the decomposition procedure hinges on an ability to make such component judgments *across* individual choices, an ability the empirical research implies we possess. My hypothesis for explaining the empirical finding is that *wholistic* judgments in a context of implicitly comparing psychologically incomparable dimensions or aspects are much more difficult than are judgments about what dimensions and aspects predict and in which direction. (The decision analyst would include weighting them, but that goes beyond the empirical results.) We can be consistent and accurate if we ask ourselves the right question. It is the commitment and ability to make

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