

ETHICS & DECISION THEORY

Decision theory is immediately relevant to axiology because of its reliance on utility theory. But can decision theory be applied to ethical problems without further ado? I doubt it because DT assigns values to <sup>outcomes</sup> ~~objectives~~ not to means: it treats means as <sup>morally</sup> ~~ethically~~ neutral, which they ~~are~~ <sup>may</sup> not be.

Example. An unemployed person is hungry and wants to eat (objective). He assigns this goal the greatest value - say unity. He can achieve it in either of two ways: (a) by getting a job and performing it (<sup>impossible</sup> ~~probability 0.1~~) or (b) by stealing (<sup>easy</sup> ~~probability 0.9~~). If he chooses the first course of action then he gets tired and hungrier; if the second, he risks getting caught. Estimating values and disvalues he concludes that, to maximize his utilities, he must steal. His reasoning contains no ethics.

We must enlarge the framework and assign (moral) utilities →

not just to the objectives (which can be done in IT) but also to the means. One way is this:

Utility of goal  $G_i =$  practical utility  $u_i +$  moral utility  $\mu_i$

Hence we redefine  $E_i^* = \sum_j p_{ij} (u_i + \mu_i)$  contains arithmetically a moral evaluation — but only of the goals. To take the moral worth <sub>of the means</sub> into account we may introduce

$v_j =$  moral weight of means  $M_j$

and may compute the total expected utility:

$$E = E_i^* + \sum_j v_j = \sum_j p_{ij} (u_i + \mu_i) + v_i.$$

2nd 83177 The next problem is to give procedures for estimating  $\mu_i$  and  $v_i$ .  
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