



4-1-1983

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Recommended Citation

Edwards, Kay P. (1983) "Agency and Certitude: The Dichotomy in Family Decision-Making," *Issues in Religion and Psychotherapy*. Vol. 9 : No. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/irp/vol9/iss2/5>

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AGENCY AND CERTITUDE: THE DICHOTOMY IN FAMILY DECISION-MAKING

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Virginia F. Cutler Lecture

Presented at Brigham Young University

18 November, 1982

There appears to be an increasing emphasis on rule-making and prescription as the preferred means for problem-solving and avoidance of decision risk in individual and family life, and by the institutions which impact on us in our families. Such an approach to family decision-making and the decision-making which affects families is evidence that the principle of agency is losing ground as individuals and families turn increasingly toward certitude in their personal and group decisions. The purpose of this paper is to examine these two approaches to decision-making in families and their relationship to decision context.

AGENCY AND CERTITUDE IN FAMILY DECISION-MAKING

Definition of Terms

Agency. Webster (1970) defines *agency* as "a faculty or state of acting or of exerting power; an instrumentality or means by which something is performed or effected." Agency is often qualified by the adjective "free", a term which means that an individual is "choosing or is capable of choosing for himself or herself." Free does not mean an "absence of all restraint", but "denotes absence of external compulsion or determination." "Free agency", therefore, means that the decision-maker is exerting power through choosing for him/herself, absent of any external compulsion or influence, but in accordance with his/her "own nature and being." Such action is, by its very nature, full of risk and prone to failure unless one has internalized the appropriate restraints, i.e., information and rules.

Certitude. *Certitude*, on the other hand, is a "quality or state of being or feeling fixed, settled, destined or sure (Webster, 1970)." In contrast to choosing for one's self, certitude, as I am using it here, is related to obedience. That is, the decision-maker attempts to make certain of the outcome by being submissive to restraint, control, or command from an external power. Such action is, by its very nature, more secure and prone to "success" if one accepts and, therefore, believes that the prescribed behavior will yield a predicted outcome, which is also the desired outcome. If the influence of the external source is powerful enough, the decision-maker may not even question outcome or behavior or connection between the two, but simply do what he/she is told or thinks that he/she was told.

A Decision-Making Continuum

These two, then, *agency* and *certitude*, seem to be at

opposite ends of a decision-making continuum along which the decision-maker moves in any choice situation.

Agency <-----> Certitude

At one end of the continuum, choice is based solely on whatever internal restraints exist within and influence the decision-maker. At the other end of the continuum, action is less decision than a response to whatever command is given or perceived to be given by the external source which holds power over the decision-maker, either literally or figuratively.

Certitude in decision-making is associated with obedience to specific instructions, for example, doing what we are told to do by parents, religious or government leaders, or so-called experts. Such a basis for decision-making grows out of fear of failure. It allows the decision-maker to transfer the risk of failure or to shift responsibility for the decision outcome from self to some "other". Although certitude provides a certain amount of protection, it also limits growth. Creativity and uniqueness are stifled by this approach to decision-making. The search for certitude leads to decision-making by prescription and recipe. The result will be "cookie-cutter" families.

In a very real sense, our own internalized acceptance of these two principles--agency and certitude--helps to keep the movement in either direction from getting out of hand. There is always a tension between the opposite ends of the continuum. If we move too close to a full emphasis on agency, our lives begin to seem chaotic and unsettling; we begin to feel insecure. We respond by seeking more certitude, thereby moving away from the agency end of the continuum. However, as we move back along the continuum toward certitude, our lives become increasingly constricted and stifling; we begin to feel apathetic and, eventually, rebellious. As we fight against the objects or elements in our environment which cause these negative outcomes, and which we may perceive with varying amounts of accuracy, we push against the pull of certitude and move back toward greater exercise of agency.

PHILOSOPHICAL BASE

In the language of philosophy, this dichotomy between agency and certitude has its foundation in *reason* as opposed to *dogmatism*. As Brown (1982, 91) has noted, "rationality (in decision-making) requires the grounding of individual beliefs or actions in underlying reasons." She goes on to say that reason "is what others have called 'intuitive reason'; the capacity of humans to grasp meanings and the relation between meanings. Reason is

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spontaneous as contrasted both with passive receptivity in receiving information and with habitual and mechanistic ways of thinking." The use of reason leads to enlightenment or a gain of rational insight.

To be a rational decision-maker requires concepts--language terms relevant to the decision being considered--and critical reflection about both the context and content of that decision. This critical reflection involves the decision-maker in a "search for clarity of comprehension" that "requires looking beneath the surface of appearances for what is really there." (Brown, 1982, 92) The decision-maker must also seek "the logical relationships between and among (these) comprehensions"--i.e., is the argument which supports a position, belief, or action logically relevant? Is there logical contradiction? As Brown (1982, 92) points out, "we can not rationally hold two beliefs which contradict each other nor can we rationally say we believe one thing but practice another which contradicts the belief."

Through childhood, critical reflection develops from the concrete toward the critical consciousness and reflection we associate with mature adult autonomy. Habermas (1979) has shown that the use of critical reflection expands as the social environment encourages and uses the reflective learning capacities of its members.

Dogmatism, as opposed to reason, "involves uncomprehending and blind, uncritical acceptance, rejection, or revision" (Brown, 1982, 92) The dogmatic decision-maker does not use his/her capacity to reason and "merges his/her views, beliefs, and values with some existing set(s) of views, beliefs and norms...without critical consciousness of their meaning and their consequences." (Brown, 1982, 92) Habermas (1971) said that dogmatism shows both moral lack and theoretical incapacity. An adequate conceptual framework within which to exercise reason is absent, and the individual refuses to recognize the capacity for autonomous reason within the self or to respect the potential for that capacity in others.

In the closed system of dogmatism, we encounter fear of criticism of existing beliefs or views, fault-finding rather than rational criticism, and self-deception as to the adequacy of existing beliefs or views reflected in attitudes of distrust and impatience with theoretical knowledge or conceptual frameworks which could enlighten. (1982)

Dogmatic decision-making is reflected in such styles as voting, technocratic selection of a course of action, and activism (merely doing). Rationality requires an effective response to a decision situation based on intelligent insight which results in the production of some kind of value. Such decisions are made according to principles.

THE APPLICATION OF PRINCIPLES IN FAMILY DECISION-MAKING

Religious scripture is our oldest source of recorded history. Two approaches to decision-making appear to have been implemented since the beginning. The first emphasized the agency of human beings. Scriptural

reference indicates that the notion of agency was elevated from a level of possible behavioral direction to an eternal principle underlying the behavior of Deity, and of such significance that its operation took precedence over the accomplishment of other significant goals held by Deity for humankind. Agency also appears to have been given preeminence over the second emphasis in decision-making, also supported by religious dogma, that of obedience. Obedience, or its reflection in the decision-maker's desire for certitude, is the high road which permits one to avoid error and its resulting consequences and, perhaps more importantly, to "please" God. (Moses 3:16, 17)

Both agency and certitude are important principles in family decision-making. It is probably unnecessary to point out that one cannot always implement both principles simultaneously. They appear to compete often as spouses, parents, and children engage in the daily struggle to develop and maintain the functioning of a viable and strong family unit.

Agency is at the heart of the very meaning of decision-making *choosing* among alternatives. The rational decision-making model describes a process of sequential steps--(1) recognizing that a need for decision exists; (2) seeking alternatives; (3) seeking information about those alternatives; (4) evaluating each as a potential for choice; and then, finally, (5) selecting one. The concept of choice requires that one be free to select among alternative modes of behavior, purposes, and communication methods. Inherent in this concept is the element of personal responsibility for decision outcome.

Certitude, on the other hand, focuses on the human desire to learn from the past and to avoid the pain and discomfort associated with failure. Reluctance to pay the price of choosing for one's self when one lacks full information is understandable. Perhaps even more understandable is the desire that a loved one, spouse or child, benefit from our understanding and experience. We reason that if they are obedient to direction, they will thereby avoid the possibility of making a mistake, which is inherent in every act of agency. However, Paolucci et al. (1977) have pointed out that

If the opportunity, responsibility, freedom, and burden of making decisions are fully accepted, individuals can build a foundation for healthy family membership and effective citizenship, for choice making is a basic human endeavor.

A family decision environment in which family members are discouraged from questioning, trying, making mistakes, and risking failure through the exercise of agency would seem to limit the development of autonomous behavior in family members. As children reach young adulthood, this lack of development may become manifest in a reluctance and/or inability to assume personal responsibility for making decisions, to accept the outcome when it is somehow disappointing, and to assume personal responsibility for the consequences.

Carried to the extreme, people may develop a condition called *decidophobia*, the fear of making decisions. Their reluctance to accept autonomy and its attendant responsibility causes them to crave a life without choice,

a life of certitude. (Paolucci, 1977, 12-14)

The Development Process

An oft-quoted statement in L.D.S. dogma is "I teach them correct principles and they govern themselves." A principle is a fundamental truth functioning as a primary law or doctrine which serves as a general and essential guideline for conduct. The application of this philosophy maximizes development of human potential. Choice is dependent upon agency. The process of internalizing principles upon which choices will be made is life-long, and begins with the birth of the child. A schema for this process has been proposed by Vygotsky and explicated by Wertsch (1979, 19) as occurring in four stages:

1. The child may fail to interpret adults' utterances in terms of the task situation.
2. The child will be able to respond to specific questions and commands of the adult in connection with the task, but his/her interpretation of adults' utterances will be limited because he/she does not understand the full implications of these utterances in light of the task demands.
3. The child will be able to follow quite nonexplicit directives (e.g. hints) in such a way that it will be obvious that she/he is operating in a sophisticated manner in the language-game.
4. The problem-solving activity shifts from the intersychological to the intrapsychological plane and the transition from other-regulation to self-regulation is completed.

Dr. A. Lynn Scoresby has labeled this process the development of moral wisdom. I am indebted to him for providing me with the insight to see that the agency-certitude dichotomy is essentially a moral development issue. That characteristic is reflected in the umbrage I take at excessive use of certitude in decision-making. I feel moral outrage; it violates my view of "right" behavior; in other words, both personally and professionally, I view inappropriate use of certitude and dogmatism as immoral.

The progress of the individual through the stages enumerated above leads to the maximum development of human potential. Part of the progress in the developmental process is to experience the results of failure. Paolucci et. al. (1977) addressed this essential component of freedom in families:

True freedom requires acceptance of responsibilities as well as a degree of maturity. When an individual is free to choose, unwise and unsound decisions as well as sound decisions may occur. The mature decision-maker recognizes this possibility, tries to minimize the number of poor decisions made, and accepts responsibility when the outcomes of decisions are disappointing.

Responsible individuals recognize limits to freedom; they are concerned about how their behavior will affect the well-being of family and society. To a considerable extent we are free to choose what we will be involved with and how responsible we will be for our environment.

...the "free family" can make choices based on a consideration of what they want and a recognition of the consequences of the decision for others and for the future of society.

Paolucci et. al. (1977) caution us that family roles may be overemphasized, thereby limiting awareness of alternatives and the action that is really possible in a decision situation. As they (Paolucci et. al., 1977, 13)

point out, "...an autonomous person chooses with open eyes, accepts the possibility of error, and has the courage to stand by his or her own beliefs."

The development of autonomy in children is one of the most important contributions the family can make.

The total family group, acting in support of the individual member, can provide security for autonomy. Life is autonomy in action, it provides freedom to choose coupled with responsibility. *The family is a basic setting for exercising this autonomy.* (Paolucci, 1977, 13)

If the pain of making mistakes is emphasized or allowed to congeal into fear of failure at any point in life, development toward autonomy stops. If choice is made by exercising agency, mistakes will sometimes occur, and the result will be disappointing or painful to a greater or lesser degree. Parent or spouse and, I might add, teacher or administrator, may rush forward to prevent pain by circumscribing choice so no or few mistakes can be made. But now, growth slows or is stopped altogether. Again, the dichotomy—too many mistakes or too serious a mistake slows or stops growth. On the other hand, excess limitation on choice slows or stops growth. In the first developmental stage described by Vygotsky (1977), agency must be highly restricted and certitude given preeminence. As the individual moves through the various stages of development, or if the individual is to move through these stages the emphasis alters, slowly and subtly, until agency is preeminent and certitude or restriction of alternatives declines and becomes largely inactive. Ideally, by the time a child reaches age 18, he/she should be well accustomed to making choices, using parents as a source of counsel and information when he/she desires, but essentially autonomous decision-makers.

Baumrind (1977) points out that we share in Western culture a general consensus that an internal locus of causality and its associated attributes reflects a higher level of development than does an external locus. Persons with high personal agency or intrinsic motivation are advantaged in our society. Such persons appear to be better adjusted, have greater cognitive competence, and possess traits that are rewarded by higher social status. Personal agency results in more political and social engagement, and more tolerance. The development of personal agency enables the individual to become increasingly independent of immediate situations and stimuli, attain greater capacity for planned action, and become better able to exercise choice and manipulate, rather than passively respond to, the environment. Personal agency, Baumrind says, is developed through practice. Children learn what they can do by having an opportunity and receiving encouragement to attempt tasks that test the limit of their abilities. Her research findings suggest that self-direction and self-reliance are developed through different parental behaviors in daughters and in sons. Daughters show greater development of personal agency when they experience parental demandingness, particularly when they have rather directive fathers. Sons, on the other hand, develop personal agency to a greater extent when parents use rather noncontrolling

practices. This minimal parental control, however, is also associated with lack of social responsibility and altruism.

It appears from Baumrind's research that different parental styles are required in parental interactions with children depending upon their sex if they are to develop the ability to exercise agency when they reach maturity. But what about after they reach the age of 18 and begin to move away from the family of orientation, both figuratively and literally? If the family did its socializing job well, a child will have learned the complexity of decision-making, the different types of rationality required, and the appropriate principles to apply in any given decision context, and will be able to move forward confidently to full autonomy.

Types of Rationality

Diesing (1962) described five types of rationality (which he did not intend to be inclusive), all of which have relevance in family decision-making:

1. Technical rationality involves decisions which lead to the efficient achievement of some goal.
2. Economic rationality includes allocation decisions which lead to the maximum achievement of a plurality of goals.
3. Social rationality incorporates those decisions which establish the social relationships, values, goals, and high purposes in a family and/or its individual members.
4. Legal rationality refers to decisions made through the application of rules when conflicts occur in the realm of social rationality.
5. Political rationality encompasses all the decisions which are made about family decision-making structures and outcomes.

Technical Rationality. The rational principle in technical decision-making is to "choose means adapted to ends". Technical rationality applies "whenever one is deciding about the means to be used in achieving an end." The value derived is "utility or the satisfaction of a desire or goal achievement". Technical rationality applies to any goal.

Economic Rationality. Economic rationality is engaged in by any system which is able to develop and maintain a set of goals as a "common good" for its members. A family which has a set of goals which are recognized and receive the commitment of family members can specify, compare, and choose among its own goals as to how it will allocate its scarce resources. The rational principle in economic decision-making is maximum goal achievement. "All goals demand achievement" and the "goals which are sacrificed should be the least important ones." In addition, "if only partial achievement is possible, the most important parts of each goal should be achieved." Both technical and economic rationality are completely impersonal.

Technical and economical rationality are associated with certitude. As Maslow (1965, 29) said,

It seems very clear to me that in an enterprise, if everybody concerned is absolutely clear about the goals and directions and far purposes of the organization, practically all other questions then become simple technical questions of fitting means to ends.

It is these two types of rationality which have been the

major focus of study by family resource management scholars.

Social Rationality. In contrast to technical and economic rationality, social rationality is carried out by a process that is almost unconscious. The pattern of shared experience in a family includes both the things family members do together and the feelings they express and share with each other. There is also a conceptual component--"how each person involved thinks of the relationships--their beliefs, obligations, expectations, and ideals," as they are institutionalized in roles. The unique development of social relations and roles in families are manifest in their individuality. Diesing says, and I agree, that social relations are the very core of life.

The relative isolation in which each family functions brings about a stability and resistance to change that integrates family members. A part of that integration will be assumed "right" ways for making technical and economic decisions. As conflicting ways of acting, thinking, and doing are encountered, family members are exposed to forces of change. These conflicts create instability in relationships, roles, values, and goals.

A disorganized family is one that cannot communicate effectively because of the conflicting values and beliefs and lack of trust generated by these forces of change. Information will be withheld or misinterpreted. The decisions that are reached do not adequately account for the values and resources of misunderstood members; such family members may be isolated from the family group or begin active opposition to the decisions of the family. Factions may develop and the family may vacillate as to who is in control of the family unit. Decisions cannot be reached and carried out.

Rational social organization in the family makes action of all kinds possible. The rational principle underlying social decision-making is self-realization for every family member, i.e., a sense of belonging, of inner security, and of the meaningfulness of life. The social actions which occur in families are an expression of not only the self, but also of solidarity with other family members. It is in social decision situations that agency can be given full expression. Social rationality has long been the focus of concern for scholars in the family relationships field. It is essential that family scholars recognize that social and economic rationality presuppose each other and are completely dependent on each other's existence. Economic rationality is possible only in a socially rational family. Conversely, a socially rational family cannot survive if it is not economically rational.

As Gardner (1965, 47) points out, this symbiotic relationship between social and techno-economic rationality creates one of the real dilemmas we face:

But goals are achieved by some means, and sooner or later even the most impulsive man of action will discover that some ways of achieving the goals are more effective than others. A concern for *how* to do it is the root impulse in all great craftsmanship, and accounts for all of the style in human performance. Without it we would never know the peaks of human achievement.

Yet, ironically, this concern for "how to do it" is also one of the diseases of which [families] die. Little by little preoccupation

with method, technique, and procedure gains a subtle dominance over the whole process of goal seeking. How it is done becomes more important than *whether* it is done. Means triumph over ends. Form triumphs over spirit. Method is enthroned. [Family members] become prisoners of their procedures, and [families] that were designed to achieve some goal become obstacles in the path of that goal.

A concern for "how to do it" is healthy and necessary. The fact that it often leads to an empty worship of method is just one of the dangers with which we have to live....

As scholars, historically we have tended to address the rationality of our chosen disciplines as if it were all-encompassing and monolithic in construct. Diesing's work exposed the multiplicity and interdependency which exists in a decision-making system such as the family. As family scholars, we face the challenge of developing an integrated approach to investigating family decision-making that will allow for this complexity.

Legal Rationality. The legal rationality described by Diesing also has relevance for family decision-making, although it has been largely ignored by family scholars in the past. The result of legal rationality is a set of fundamental rules which are appealed to for the guidance of family members when conflicts occur. The value produced for the family, or the rational principle being applied in its exercise of legal rationality is "justice", i.e., a system of rules which are clear, consistent, detailed, and technically administered with impartiality, fairness, or equality. Such rules differentiate classes of family members and demand different things from them. Inherent in the notion of legal rationality is the assurance that other family members can be depended on to perform at least their basic duties. This is accomplished by specifying duties for each family member so everyone knows what is expected, calling the family's attention as a whole to each member's duties, teaching these duties to the relevant person, and imposing sanctions of various sorts on those family members who fail to perform. Rules should provide family members with a clear guide to conduct. However, every family need not and, in fact, should not have the same rules. The issue is not that there is some ideal set of rules, but that each family develops a set of rules to help guide the conduct of the members of that family. Neal Maxwell (1978, 55) referred to this when he said,

We must bear in mind that while there are obvious differences as to what all the basic truths and values are, having such tactical differences is very unlike the sad conclusion that there are no basic truths at all....If we are not committed to certain truths, ambiguity will replace absolutes, tentativeness will replace truth, regulations measured by the pound instead of by principles will replace liberty, a tenured bureaucracy will replace democracy, and hesitancy will replace heroism.

Once [a family] loses its capacity to declare that some things are wrong, *per se*, then it finds itself forever building temporary defenses, revising rationales, drawing new lines...but forever falling back and losing its nerve. A [family] which permits anything will eventually lose everything.

It seems to me that legal rationality offers the potential for the most extreme expression of certitude in

family decision-making.

The question family members must constantly ask is whether, through dependence on rules, as Brown says, we are refusing "1) to accept the capacity for autonomous reason in oneself, and 2) to respect that potential capacity in others." As Brown (1982, 92-93) points out,

Dogmatism is a closed system in that the substance of beliefs and ways of thinking and acting are not open to question;...Closed systems...become habitual and, therefore, create a form of life where the force of habit prevails rather than the force of reason. Therefore, dogmatism often shows itself in fear of criticism of existing beliefs or views and in the conceptual confusion of mere fault-finding with rational criticism. Related to the fear of criticism, dogmatism is also often shown in self-deception regarding the adequacy of one's own existing beliefs and views. It is reflected in distrust of and impatience with theoretical knowledge or conceptual frameworks which could be enlightening....What other people say or do is unconsciously distorted to conform to an absolute interpretation. Because of the habit of avoiding the grasping of relations in meaning, dogmatism is shown in unconsciously accepting contradictions;...reading,...listening, as well as speaking are conducted...without logically placing the parts in the context of the whole.

Legal rationality is an area of family decision-making to which family scholars must give greater attention.

Political Rationality. The political rationality described by Diesing is an area of decision-making which has frequently been addressed by family scholars in both the resource management and relationships areas. This is the rationality of the decision-making structure in the family itself, how decisions get made. The structure is made up of (1) discussion relationships, in which talking, listening, asking and answering questions, suggesting courses of action, and accepting them take place; (2) a set of common beliefs and values; and (3) the set of commitments which have already been accepted by the family and the courses of action in which it is already engaged. Within this decision-making structure, the family engages in problem-solving, persuasion, bargaining, and "politics", such as forming coalitions, marshalling resources, or diverting an opponent's resources.

As a family decision structure is able to consider a greater variety of presented facts, values, goals, norms, and variety of alternatives, the more effective its decisions are likely to be. In addition, the more intricate and subtle the ways in which the presented factors are unified, the more effective the decision is likely to be. Since these two characteristics are likely to be in conflict with one another, a family would be considered functionally rational if it yielded adequate decisions for complex situations with some regularity. The integrative decisions required by the family system require a central authority figure who encourages participation, is accepting, supportive, and sensitive to half-expressed feelings, and interprets and transmits the more hesitant statements of other group members. The task of the authority figure is to develop group consensus. If this aspect of responsibility is not recognized and consciously pursued by the authority

figures in a family, the consequences can be serious for every family member and for the family system. As Diesing (1962, 194) points out,

When parents pay too much attention to moral problems in relations with their children—when they are primarily concerned over whether the children's behavior is right or wrong, and when they try to guide conduct by prescribing duties—they become judicial figures and take on the detachment proper to judges. The entire family decision structure is legalized and attention is focused on the exact scope and meaning of rules, consistency of parents' judgments, rules of evidence, and so on. Attention is focused on surface aspects of behavior rather than on underlying personality (integrative) problems. Parents are too detached to enter hidden meanings of the child's life: they have become prisoners of their own moralizing."

Decision-making structures, such as families, which must handle a variety of problems, should retain a great deal of flexibility in their decision structure. The rational decision-maker has self-mastery; he or she can be open, decisive, flexible, perceptive, and realistic in dealings with other people. This kind of rationality removes internal obstacles to decision-making, such as conflict, rigidity, and disproportionate influence. The principle in decision structure is to organize the perceptive, creative, and communicative faculties so that effective decisions can be made. The good which comes from political rationality is intelligence, and the ability to effectively solve problems.

The Results of Rationality. The outcome from the exercise of these five types of rationality in family decision-making might be called *freedom*. Technical and economic rationality produce freedom in an external sense through power over resources. Social rationality produces freedom in an internal sense in that one is able to act without internal hindrance. Legal rationality gives freedom in the sense of a dependable noninterference with one's rights, and political freedom comes from participation in decisions which govern one's own life (Diesing, 1962).

Kaprowski (1973, 234) urged that we consciously implement rationality in family decision-making:

Try family by objectives. Together decide what the major objectives of the family should be, and how these should tie in to the specific objectives of each family member. Periodically review progress toward these objectives.

Set up specific developmental goals for the family, and determine the necessary strategies to reach those goals. Among these goals might be becoming aware of options in life, and learning how to learn, how to make choices, how to interact efficiently with other people, how to appreciate beauty and feeling as well as logic and reason, and how to validate knowledge.

Each of the five types of rationality discussed in this paper differ in purpose and principle. When we try to make decisions in a social context using technical rationality, or vice versa, only confusion, delay, misunderstanding, and conflict can result. If decisions are made, they are frequently unsatisfactory and implementation is problematic if it can be achieved at all.

The core decisions in the family are social and political decisions. However, social and political decisions cannot be implemented; goals cannot be achieved; values cannot

be realized if we ignore technical, economic, and legal rationality. The achievement of ultimate ends and purposes established through the exercise of agency depends on the effective managerial decision-making associated with certitude. Families must take great care, however, not to allow these "means" decisions to assume preeminence over the goals decisions and decisions about the distribution and exercise of power and authority. Resource management decisions should be subservient to relationships decisions in family life, just as the scriptures indicate that Diety made certitude (obedience) subservient to agency. This does not mean, however, that they are less important as a focus for research and teaching among family scholars. Either without the other is meaningless and an ineffective way to exercise decision-making in families.

THE FAMILY UNIT AND DECISION-MAKING

The family system is an integrated (united into a cohesive whole) and interdependent (mutually dependent) group of people. One purpose which the family system serves is the preparation of its younger members for independence or autonomy--freedom from control by others and the exercise of self-government. It is my judgment that family decision-making is not a simple homogeneous activity. It should not be confused with the process model of rational decision-making. Family decision-making is complex. It has many facets, each of which must be understood and integrated with other components to make up the behavior we tend to lump together and call decision-making. Relationships scholars have usually not seen this diversity and have tended to focus their attention on the types of task decisions most frequently associated with or assigned to specific family roles. Resource management specialists, on the other hand, have paid lip service to social decision-making by accepting goals as given and have then focused on the technical and economic decision-making required to bring about goal achievement. A comprehensive view of decision-making in families with a simultaneous awareness of its various parts is necessary if we are to understand the division between the relationships and resource management views of decision-making, reconcile, and integrate them.

In summary, the words of John Steinbeck (1952) from *East of Eden* are appropriate. As you may recall, Lee and the Chinese scholars had deliberated for several years about the true meaning of the Hebrew word *timshel* in Jehovah's admonition to Cain. In the *King James* version, the translation had been "thou shalt rule over him," while the *American Standard Bible* said "Do thou rule over him." Lee tells Samuel,

After two years we felt that we could approach your sixteen verses of the fourth chapter of Genesis. My old gentlemen felt that these words were very important, too--'Thou shalt' and 'Do thou.' And this was the gold from our mining: 'Thou mayest. 'Thou mayest rule over sin.' (Steinbeck, 1952, 348-349)

But the Hebrew word, the word *timshel*--'Thou mayest'-- that gives a choice. It might be the most important word in the world. That says the way is open. That throws it right back on a

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man. For if 'Thou mayest'--it is also true that 'Thou mayest not.' Don't you see? Why, that makes a man great, that gives him stature with the gods, for in his weakness and his filth and his murder of his brother he has still the great choice. He can choose his course and fight it through and win.' Lee's voice was a chant of triumph. (Steinbeck, 1952, 349)

...I feel that I am a man. And I feel that a man is a very important thing--maybe more important than a star. I have a new love for the human soul. It is a lovely and unique thing in the universe. It is always attacked and never destroyed--because 'Thou mayest.' (Steinbeck, 1952, 350)

If there is error in our application of agency and certitude in family decision-making, or in our research and teaching about them, let it be in favor of agency.

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