

The Utrecht method for moral reflection

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Phases of deliberation

- I. Exploration
- II. Making explicit
- III. Analysis
- IV. Balancing
- V. Conclusion

Phase I & II

1. Exploration

- What first reactions?

2. Making explicit

- What is the moral question?
- Which options?
- What information is needed?

(NB Sometimes: go back to start)

Phase III - V

3. Analysis

- Who are involved?
- What arguments?

4. Balancing

- The weight of the arguments?
- For which option do we have best reasons?

5. Conclusion

- Specific action

Characteristics of the Utrecht method

- Intersubjective
- Aimed at real world cases
- Pluralistic: different sorts of arguments can be given
 - Appeals to duties and rights
 - Appeals to virtues
- Argumentative: strength of conclusion is determined by strength of reasoning

Philosophical background

- Constructivist idea of moral truth
 - Why we should believe that the conclusion is more than just the consensus of those present
- Reflective equilibrium (RE)
 - Developed by Rawls, Daniels, DePaul

Moral truth

- Moral truth does exist, but different from physics
- No relativism, universalisability!
- Strength of conclusion is determined by strength of reasoning
- Conclusions may be changed when better arguments are provided
- Moral point of view in moral deliberation

The moral point of view

- Normative: consider right and wrong
- Non-dogmatic: delay appeals to
 - Philosophy of life
 - culture
 - emotions
- Argumentative (avoid authority claims)
- Consider all parties involved: put yourself in their position

RE: the Rawlsian idea

- When developing a general theory or answering practical problems...
- bring to bear all kinds of moral and non-moral beliefs and theories (elements of various reflective levels)
- considered moral judgements, principles (background theories, ideals, ...)

RE: the idea (2)

- Continuous process of revising and refining elements
- Seeking coherence between elements, without prioritising some elements (coherentist method)
- NB: RE is a process and a product
- RE: a model of persuasive argumentation

RE in applied ethics

- CMJ's taken as judgements about specific situations/cases
- principles taken as more general normative propositions
- add: morally relevant facts (context sensitivity) and background theories/ideals

Conclusion

- Utrecht model is suitable for practical moral problems
- May help to justify steps in moral dilemmas
- Model can be used alone and in groups