

# Methods for moral inquiry in the context of HTA

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- HTA: Exploring the value of a healthcare technology
- Ethics: taking a stand against indifference towards human suffering, injustice, cruelty, and oppression, while recognizing the many challenges that are associated with that

# Challenges

- Limited knowledge and understanding of the consequences of our (in)actions
- Radically opposing views of what constitutes a good life
- Conflicting demands from our commitments to different values (e.g., the tension between freedom and equality)

# Example

- Deep Brain Stimulation (DBS) in patients with minimal consciousness (e.g., after severe head trauma)

# HTA Questions

- Does it work?
- Is it safe?
- How does the benefit compare to the necessary resources?

# Input from ethics:

- The evidence that is collected derives its relevance from underlying values, e.g.:
  - Beneficence
  - Non-maleficence
  - Justice

# Facts & Values

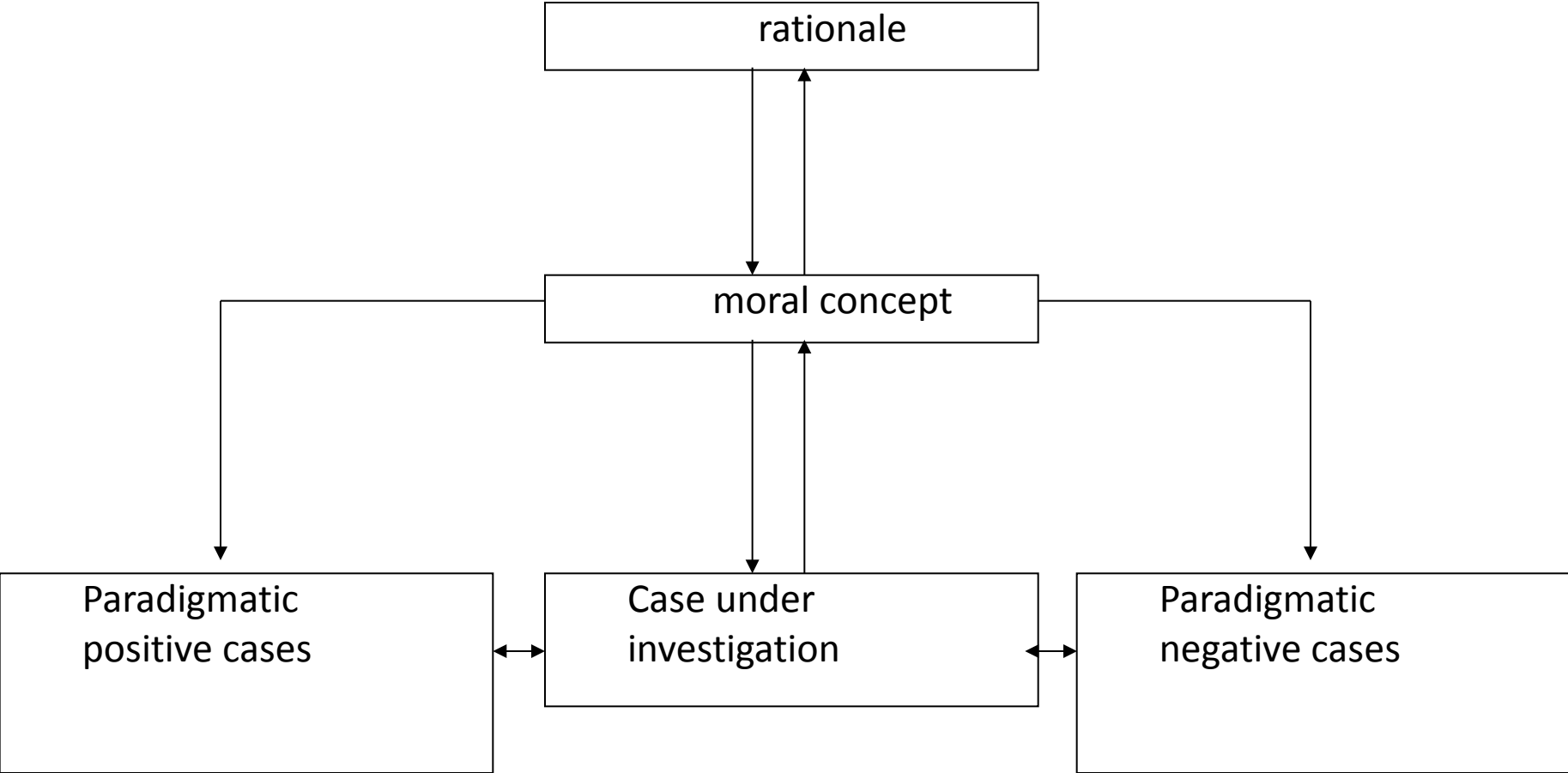
- NOT: collect the data, and then raise the value issue, but
- Explore what the values are that explain why we ask *these* questions and why we collect *this* evidence

# Values are open-textured

- There are no criteria that are both necessary and sufficient to establish whether a particular value has been correctly applied
- Deductive argument is invalid
- Coherentist approach is necessary, e.g. Reasoning by analogy



# Formal model of moral argumentation (Brennan)



# Questions to be asked [1]

- What is (are) the ethical value(s) that seem to explain our initial judgment in this matter?
- If we are in doubt about its correct explication (What follows from our commitment to this value in this particular situation?), propose relevant cases where the explication is more straightforward

# Questions to be asked (2)

- If doubt persists, propose a rationale for the moral value that seems to be at stake (answer to the question why it is important in the first place)

# Steps in moral inquiry

- Moral perplexity
- Formulate moral hypothesis ('this seems to be morally (in)appropriate since it is a specific instance of cases, classified by the moral value ABC')
- Conduct moral inquiry (reasoning by analogy)
- Conclude by formulating a moral judgment (claim to support or challenge the truth of the initial moral hypothesis)

# DBS in patients with minimal conscious state

- Demand on solidarity of the community justified?
- For instance because it:
  - Protects capabilities? (e.g., treatment of major depression)
  - Relieves suffering (e.g., sedation in patients with colorectal cancer)
  - Protects human dignity (e.g., treatment of drooling in children with cerebral palsy)

# Normative inquiry in the context of HTA

- Attempt to conduct the inquiry in a more systematic way, while
- Clarifying the relation between facts and values, and
- Being more transparent and, therefore, open to public scrutiny

# Reporting

- Who participated in the inquiry?
- What moral hypotheses were formulated?
- What analogous cases were used in order to clarify the issue?
- What rationale(s) were proposed? How did they affect the inquiry?
- Were initial hypotheses revised?

# Overall objective

- Bringing values to bear on healthcare practices involving the use of healthcare technologies