



VALUE CONFLICTS AND MORAL CHOICE: REJUSTIFYING YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIFE STANCE THROUGH BIBLIOTHERAPY

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23340875>

Abstract: *This article examines value conflicts and moral choice in bibliotherapeutic reading. Conceptual comparison and hermeneutic analysis explore the conditions for rejustifying decisions. A three-layer account links epistemic accuracy, normative reasons and practical responsibility. A literary case distinguishes alternatives, objections and obligations that remain after a choice.*

Keywords: *value conflict, moral choice, bibliotherapy, life stance, value pluralism, reflection, personal autonomy.*

INTRODUCTION

The socio-philosophical problem of working with a literary text in bibliotherapy does not end with the reader's emotional relief: it also concerns understanding why the reader gives priority to one value over another, to whom this choice pertains, and what responsibility remains afterwards. Research on shared reading links text, discussion and social relations, yet its results do not confirm that the same effect exists for all groups [1]. For this reason, the article treats bibliotherapy not as clinical treatment but within the framework of voluntary reflective dialogue mediated by a literary text.

Nussbaum studies moral understanding as attention to the concrete person and situation alongside abstract rules, and as a connection between emotion and intellect [2]. The question that follows from this approach is: is sympathy with a character sufficient for approving his decision? The article distinguishes these two states. A reader may understand a character's suffering yet reject his argument, or defend the decision while acknowledging the loss it entails. These are logical possibilities, not observed respondent results.

Ross's plurality of duties, Chang's account of hard choices and Costella's views on ultimate ends reveal the limits of reducing choice to a single criterion of utility [3–5]. These theories are not equated with one another. The research question is: how can one distinguish, in bibliotherapeutic reading, between young people's mere change of position and its well-grounded reconsideration? The aim is to develop a basis for analyzing value conflict in the unity of epistemic accuracy, normative reasoning and practical responsibility.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The work is a theoretical-conceptual study. Sources were verified as of 23 September 2026. The target corpus consists of nine scholarly sources [1–9] and O. Henry's story "After Twenty Years" [10]. The selection criteria were direct relevance to value conflict, reading experience or autonomy, and verification of the authors' and publication details. The selection is not presented as a full systematic review. The literary work was chosen because it allows

conflicting obligations to be discussed in a concrete situation; it is not a statistical source on young people's behavior.

Conceptual differentiation was used to separate value, norm, motive and reason; hermeneutic analysis to interpret the episodes of the story; and the comparative method to test alternative grounds. In each interpretation, the textual fact, the reader's conjecture and the normative judgment were recorded separately. The unit of analysis was not the final emotion but the reasons supporting the judgment. The proposal is intended for non-clinical reading settings with adult young people; no primary survey, interview or experiment was conducted.

The author's own development is a matrix consisting of a three-layer interpretation and six analytical moves. It is neither an algorithm that automatically derives a moral decision nor a validated diagnostic instrument. Theoretical claims, the results of earlier empirical work, the content of the story and the author's hypothetical examples were kept in separate statuses. This delimitation serves to avoid confusing normative justifiedness with practical effectiveness.

RESULTS

Recognizing the conflict and distinguishing the grounds of choice. The first conceptual result is a working definition of axiological conflict: a situation in which at least two defensible values cannot be fully realized together under the existing conditions. For example, the demand of loyalty to a close person may collide with the demand of impartiality. Value answers the question "what is worthwhile?", norm "how ought one to act?", motive "what moved me?", and reason "what justifies my decision?". The sincerity of a motive does not by itself guarantee the sufficiency of a reason.

For Ross, there is a plurality of *prima facie* duties, each generating an obligation in a particular respect; the right action is determined neither by goodness of intention alone nor by usefulness of consequences alone [3]. In bibliotherapeutic analysis, this distinction is used to show the break in an inference such as "friendship is good, therefore anything is permissible for a friend". The relation that grounds the duty must be identified. Then its relation to the other demands in the same situation is examined.

Not every hesitation counts as a moral dilemma. A lack of information, a narrow imagination of the available options, and a genuine collision of well-grounded obligations must be distinguished. In Chang's interpretation, in some hard choices the alternatives are comparable, yet one is not better, worse or exactly equal to the other; they may stand in a relation of being "on a par" [4]. It does not follow that all options are equally permissible. Costella analyzes how, in hard choices concerning ultimate ends, moral and agential constraints are placed on the order of decision [5].

In this article, a life stance is understood as a value orientation that links a person's own goals, obligations to others and criteria of choice. A judgment about a single character reveals only one aspect of this orientation. Rejustification therefore does not mean replacing one ready-made opinion with another; it means clarifying the origin, scope of application and limits of the criterion.

The second result is the division of rejustifying a life stance into three layers. The epistemic layer checks information and conjecture about the event. The normative layer makes alternative values and the criterion of choice explicit. The practical layer determines what the decision imposes on whom, what obligation remains, and under what circumstances it should

be reconsidered. Improvement in one layer does not automatically close a gap in another: a person who knows the event correctly may still be unable to explain his criterion.

In the three-layer approach, maintaining a position can also be a result of rejustification. The important difference lies not in the final “yes” or “no” but in whether the counter-argument is considered and the limit is understood. Conversely, there is insufficient basis to conclude that independent reflection has occurred in a reader who changed his decision under group influence but cannot explain his reasons. In such a case, what is examined is not the direction of the change but its evidential structure.

The third result is a separate analysis of the responsibility that remains after a choice. Giving priority to one obligation does not necessarily render the other relationship meaningless. Even if the decision is defended as well-grounded, the questions of giving an explanation, reducing the inconvenience caused, or seeking another way of helping may remain open. The interpretation in this article accepts regret neither as an automatic sign of a wrong decision nor as a guarantee of moral maturity.

An analytical matrix for rejustifying a decision. The matrix below connects the three layers within a single analysis. The moves need not be performed in a strict sequence: new evidence may require a return to an earlier judgment. The object of assessment is not the reader’s repetition of the “correct” value but his statement of his own judgment on open and verifiable grounds.

Table 1. Moves from axiological conflict to a well-grounded position

Analytical move	Reflective question	Evidence in the response	Interpretive limit
Isolating the conflict	Which two well-grounded demands collide?	Two values and their bearers.	Hesitation alone is not a dilemma.
Testing assumptions	What is known, and what is conjecture?	Fact, conjecture and information gap.	Conjecture does not replace fact.
Shifting perspective	What is the strongest argument of the other side?	A fair statement of the alternative position.	Understanding is not agreement.
Justifying the criterion	Why does this criterion prevail in this situation?	The decision, the reason, and a reply to a serious objection.	Popularity is not a moral ground.
Identifying the remaining duty	After the decision, what do I owe, and to whom?	An explanation, caution, or an offer of help.	Regret does not prove a mistake.
Setting a condition for revisiting	What new evidence would change the decision?	A testable condition and re-evaluation.	Maintaining a position can also be well-grounded.

The matrix does not convert a person's moral worth into a score. It is proposed to show which part of the reasoning has been disclosed in the course of reading and discussion. A participant who does not reveal his personal life and only analyzes the literary situation also provides fully acceptable material.

A literary situation: the collision of friendship and official duty. In O. Henry's story "After Twenty Years", Bob comes to the agreed place to meet his friend Jimmy Wells after twenty years. Jimmy, now a patrol officer, recognizes him and realizes that he is wanted in Chicago. Unable to arrest Bob himself, he sends another officer; later he conveys what he has done through a short note [10]. This is a literary plot. The characters' conduct in it is not taken as evidence of real young people's choices or of any modern legal order.

An initial interpretation may make loyalty to a friend the sole center of the story. However, such an interpretation, which ignores the duty of service and the information about the manhunt, narrows the range of facts. Conversely, merely mentioning the duty of service does not exhaust all the moral aspects of Jimmy's decision. The proposal of this article here is not to approve or condemn the character at once, but to examine, when personal closeness collides with an institutional role, which reason grounds which level of claim.

The analysis is deepened through three questions: did the fact that another officer carried out the task change the content of the obligation; which part of the relationship did leaving a note for the friend preserve; and if the evidential basis of the decision proved mistaken, how would the judgment be revised? The last question is not an event that occurs in the story but a *counterfactual* proposed by the author. Its function is to separate an appeal to official duty from the well-grounded application of that duty in a concrete case.

In the end, a reader may keep his original judgment, but he no longer equates friendship with impunity or duty with emotional indifference. Another reader may object to the manner in which the decision was carried out while recognizing the duty itself. These are foreseeable interpretive paths, not recorded experimental results. The difference lies not in the direction of the conclusion but in which facts and norms it rests on. The ending of the story does not serve as a model judgment that closes the discussion.

Cautious application to a life stance. In a separate hypothetical situation constructed by the author, a student notices that a friend's assignment contains appropriated text. The demands of personal loyalty, honesty, and helping the friend without humiliating him are distinguished. Concealing the text, hastily accusing the friend publicly, or verifying the source before drawing a conclusion and discussing a path of correction do not require the same grounds. The literary event cannot be transferred to this situation one-to-one: the authority, the evidence and the consequences differ. What is compared is not the plot but the method of justifying a decision.

Fricker analyzes the injustice of not recognizing experience as a source of knowing and of lacking the means to understand it [6]. From this standpoint, the risk of dismissing an argument in advance according to age or status within a reading group should be examined separately. Akhlaghi discusses the limits of interference with human autonomy in self-forming choices [9]. The practical conclusion of this article is that a facilitator may ask for alternative grounds but must not impose a ready-made life stance in the participant's place. This is not a clinical instruction but an ethical design of the discussion.

In socio-philosophical analysis, the bearer of the choice is taken not as an isolated consciousness but as a subject embedded in friendship, professional roles and group

expectations. In discussion, it is proposed to distinguish the grounds “I value this” and “this is expected of me”. Their difference does not mean that a personal value is free of social sources; the question is whether the reader can justify the demand in his own name or repeats it only out of anxiety about external evaluation. This difference cannot be strictly determined from a single answer.

DISCUSSION

The philosophical contribution of the proposal lies not in necessarily eliminating conflict but in justifying the possibility of ordering it with reasons. Nussbaum’s view of situation-sensitive moral understanding [2] opens the way for not reducing a text to a ready-made moral lesson. However, a deep understanding of one character does not imply acting rightly in all real relationships. Therefore, aesthetic influence, the sharpening of judgment, and change in everyday conduct should be studied separately.

In the 2024 meta-analysis by Wimmer and colleagues, small-scale cognitive effects of reading fiction were identified; in the experimental part, the results depended on the type of measure and the comparison condition [7]. That work does not test precisely this matrix of moral rejustification of a life stance. The 2025 review by Järholm and colleagues notes that most existing studies of shared reading are limited by small samples and limited comparability [1]. These sources help in discussing the prospects of the theoretical mechanism, but they do not prove its effectiveness.

Troscianko, Holman and Carney examined text and discussion materials of two reading groups through qualitative coding and quantitative methods [8]. Their methodological experience guides the present proposal toward separating the initial individual writing, the discussion record and the final independent justification. In a future test, ordinary discussion groups and groups oriented toward value conflict, working with the same text, could be compared. This is a research design that has not yet been carried out.

In testing the result, two analysts could work independently on distinguishing the articulation of a counter-argument, the justification of the criterion and the condition for revisiting; disagreements could be kept together with the initial notes. A new response to a substantively different situation, given without support, would serve to check that the position does not depend only on the familiar story. Language fluency, prior reading experience, adaptation to the facilitator and the ability to speak in a group are considered as alternative explanations. The length of a response is not equated with moral justifiedness.

Limitations: A single story does not cover all cultural situations; no data on real young people were collected; and from monographs whose full text is not open, only conceptual claims confirmed in the publisher’s open description were used. For application in the Uzbek context, the language of the text, the quality of its translation and its social context must be tested separately. Participation is voluntary, and speaking about personal experience is not mandatory. Such a discussion is not intended to replace clinical help; personal writings may become research material only within the bounds of consent.

CONCLUSION

A three-layer interpretation of rejustifying a life stance has been developed for bibliotherapeutic reading oriented toward axiological conflict: distinguishing fact from conjecture, justifying the normative criterion, and identifying the responsibility that remains after a choice. This interpretation does not evaluate replacing a decision as self-improvement

in itself, nor maintaining it as rigidity. The main criterion is the openness of the reply to the alternative argument and of the condition for revisiting the decision.

The matrix and the literary example are presented as a theoretical development. Their practical significance lies not in instilling a ready-made moral judgment but in specifying verifiable questions that help a young reader explain his own choice in relation to the interests of others and to social obligations. The result is not an empirically confirmed effect; future research should examine independent interpretation, the conditions of dialogue and behavioral evidence separately.

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