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Moral Argument: Theory and Practice

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Moral Argument

Theory and Practice

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Moral Argument -- Theory and Practice

I. The Problem: Introducing Rigor Into Moral Argument

1. A Problem of National and Cross-Disciplinary Scope

There is a 'boom' in the teaching of ethics, across the nation and across diverse schools and departments of the arts and sciences and the professions. This is surely a good thing. And it's apt to continue. And that is also a good thing. The question is of course: What in the way of ethics ought to be taught? This is an arguable matter to be sure, not to say one on which jealous disciplines wage minor holy wars.

The Hastings Center Institute of Society, Ethics and the Life Sciences recently completed a comprehensive two-year study of the teaching of ethics in higher education. This study was prompted in large measure by the dramatic development in the last decade of a widely shared concern of both liberal arts and professional schools that ethics become a more prominent feature of liberal and professional education. The study issued in a national conference, a report and a series of monographs on the teaching of ethics, especially 'applied' ethics in various professional and pre-professional curricula. I take this ten-volume series to be tolerably definitive of the issues and alternatives attending the question: Just exactly <u>what</u> in the way of ethics should be taught in response to the widely perceived need for <u>more</u> ethics, to say nothing of <u>applied</u> ethics? I will cite here only the salient theme of the study, the repeated observations and recommendations that argue for the need that my project proposes to address:

> The most common problem facing the teacher of ethics is that of achieving a suitable balance between theoretical material and case studies. (<u>The Teaching of Ethics</u>, Vol. I, p. 69.)
>
> Although it is of course important that individual cases be considered--for that is the way most moral dilemmas arise--it is no less important to assist students to develop the skills necessary to generalize from cases. (p. 70.)
>
> Our list of important goals in the teaching of ethics points in one general direction: that having elicited the feelings and emotions of students with, say, suitable case studies, film and literary material , a very rapid movement must be made into the full rigor of the subject. Students should be led to understand that there are general standards by which to judge the quality of ethical arguments, that disagreements are inevitable but can be reduced....(p. 52.)
>
> All courses, even the most introductory, should expose students to the existence of

> advanced ethical inquiry and ethical theory.... including inquiry into the justification of moral judgments. (P. 52, underscoring mine.)
>
> Our own general conclusion can be stated quite directly...that the primary purpose of courses in ethics ought to be to provide students with those concepts and analytical skills that will enable them to grapple with broad ethical theory underscoring mine in attempting to resolve both personal and professional dilemmas, as well as to reflect on the moral issues facing the larger society.... Those are the tools of rationality in ethics, the means by which some order is given to the relatively untutored deliverances of experience and previous conditioning. (Pp. 48-50).

Now, there is considerable doubt about 'the capacity of students to grapple with the larger issues of ethical theory' (p.26). I rather believe that students have good reason to be confounded by the enterprise of 'advanced ethical inquiry': they simply lack the requisite theoretical tools. Introductory treatments of moral-philosophic theory and methods are cursory at best, and advances in state-of-the-art theory and practice are not made accessible to non-professionals 'in the trenches' where urgent moral argument is waged. Teachers and students of applied ethics need philosophically advanced but pedagogically compelling models of how argument can and should proceed on 'the larger issues of ethical theory.' I will be more specific presently, but consider, for starters, the paradoxical array of propositions with which an initiate to 'advanced ethical inquiry' must grapple:

2. Theoretic Quandries for the Conduct of Rational Moral Argument

I can only suggest here the sense of paradox that must attend any introduction to 'advanced ethical inquiry and theory': the following are propositions each of which moral philosophy must take quite seriously, but which taken together seem paradoxical indeed.

- That moral **'truth'** is at bottom relative and 'subjective'; yet that it is a viable, intelligible regulative notion, and, in principle, a testable, confirmable, tolerably 'objective' commodity.

- That what is plausible may not be true, and what is true may not be plausible; yet **plausibility** is a crucial criterion and regulative guide in the search for truth, especially where the latter is necessarily in perennial dispute. And plausibility is surely a 'relative' matter.

- That moral **concepts** (like 'justice') are **'essentially'** (hence, endlessly) controversial; yet rationally negotiable, arguably decidable, and practically indispensable..

- That general moral **principles** are always defeasible; yet rationally defensible and practically indispensable.

- That fundamental **disagreement** in moral matters or moral theory is inevitable and perennial; yet there is a final court of appeal for its reasoned adjudication.

- That **contrary** moral judgments and values can be equally **justified**; yet argument about principle and policy is, in principle and practice, resolvable for one side or the other.

- That moral judgments are always **corrigible**; yet nonetheless **verifiable** and tolerably certain, or at least no less so in principle than 'factual' judgments.
- That the process of justification in moral philosophy is indeed **circular**; yet neither viciously nor pointlessly so.
- That moral argument may be in some real sense **groundless**; yet eminently rational and rationally compelling--and no less so than 'scientific' dispute.
- That moral argument is above all a **rational** enterprise; yet one in which **non**-rational factors of our imagination and sensibility play a crucial role.

3. The Practical Import of Naive Theoretic Quandry in Moral Argument

Among the greatest practical obstacles to learning the art and ethos of rational moral argument are the perennial issues of moral epistemology, meta-ethics, and the methodology of moral-theoretic inquiry.

Issues surrounding the problematic propositions cited above are paramount, not only in the theoretical order of things, but practically, for how and whether moral argument and the teaching of moral argument proceeds, both in the 'real' world and in the classroom, respectively.

Advanced ethical inquiry does not create its quandries gratuitously. Its issues are not born and confined in the 'ivory tower.' Nor are they practically remote from the uninitiated. In nearly every student lurks an inchoate ethical 'relativist.' And, in confounding schizophrenic fashion, a dogmatic 'absolutist':

> A thoroughgoing ethical relativism is...a common starting point for many..students at the beginning of an ethics course. But paradoxically, many..students are ethical absolutists, although they share the relativist's assumption that there is no rational basis for comparing ethical positions, and they are unwilling (and/or unable) to present any arguments in defense of their own principles. (Vol. VII, p.12.)

I will paraphrase a typical example from a *Wall Street Journal* feature, "When Values Are Substituted for Truth," by William J. Bennett (I've lost the issue and date):

> Student: "I don't think you can teach ethics because there really aren't any in any real sense. Each person's values are as good as anybody else's. Values are subjective."
>
> Teacher: "No, that's not true. Some people's values are better than others."
>
> Student: "No, they're subjective. No one can impose his values on somebody else."
>
> Teacher: "Well what do you think of this? I say values are not subjective and, if you don't agree with me, then I'll flunk you."
>
> Student: "You can't do that! Are you crazy?"
>
> Teacher: "No. And I can do that. Why not?"
>
> Student: "Well...er,...because it's not fair!"

Inchoate, naive, and often inconsistent moral-theoretic views can wreak havoc with any group's attempt to pursue rational moral argument or to resolve conflicts in practice. The existence of

unexamined moral theory is a practical obstacle to progressive controversy in any would-be moral community. It can be detrimental to individual development as well:

William Perry's studies at Harvard of the patterns of intellectual and ethical development in the college years suggest that, whatever students' tacit commitments to ethical relativism, their learning to operate within a working framework of 'contextual relativism' is a difficult yet crucial phase in their ethical and general conceptual development. Certainly the ability to handle relativity, to assess the plausibility of concepts and values relative to different contexts of belief and purpose--this is a prerequisite for any advanced ethical inquiry. And the ability to negotiate disagreements about what is right and what is wrong--or whether it's even possible to decide on rational grounds--are not readily acquired in the absence of such tools as the state of the philosophic art can provide: 'the inevitable disagreement among students about which normative ethical theory is correct...bogs down, almost always, because students lack the means for working it out' (Vol. IX, p.38).

What order of theoretical perspective, then, is necessary to address the practical problem--in life and in the classroom--of how basic disagreement in normative matters might be negotiated? I agree with Robert Baum in the following assessment, that the order of theoretical and methodological reflection required is quite high, and that it needs go beyond the confines of moral philosophy to a consideration of rational inquiry generally:

> It is imperative that the instructor work through the whole set of epistemological...presuppositions--doing almost a minicourse in the philosophy of science as well as meta-ethics--in order to even begin to communicate with students concerning the possibility of doing ethics in any sense that involves the resolution of ethical conflicts or disagreements. (Vol. VII, p.12.)

The following section indicates how reflection on one of the major afflictions of moral argument--namely, it's apparent circularity-- could benefit from comparative reflection on the 'virtuous' circularity of more 'tried and true' areas of human inquiry and argument.

4. The Need for Comparative Studies in Normative Epistemology

Inevitably students come to sense the 'circularity' as well as the 'contextually relative' nature of the justificatory procedure on all levels of moral-theoretic argument.

I think it instructive for those who tend to be mystified or made skeptical by the apparent paradoxes of moral philosophy--or for those who seek too easily to escape paradox by espousing one half-truth and rejecting its contrary--to realize that analogous paradoxes attend other if not all fields of rational inquiry, even those which are paragons of practical utility and theoretical rigor. This fact does not by itself defeat the presumption that inquiry and dispute in these fields is preeminently rational and productive of 'truth.' Since I cannot elaborate, I will cite good authority:

Take as an example the circularity that apparently afflicts the attempt to ground moral argument. The following authoritative statements attest that this is in fact a common feature of rational inquiry in the most paradigmatically 'scientific' or practical of fields, and hardly cause

for fatal skepticism--notably, in the foundations of logic, science, and the law:

> How do we justify a deduction? Plainly, by showing that it conforms to the general rules of deductive inference. But how is the validity of the rules to be determined? ...By their conformity with accepted deductive practice. This looks flagrantly circular. But this circle is a virtuous one.... All this applies equally well to induction.... Predictions are justified if they conform to valid canons of induction; and the canons are valid if they accurately codify accepted inductive practice.... And the task of formulating rules that define the difference between valid and invalid inductive inferences is much like the task of defining any term with an established usage... the interplay we observed between rules...and particular inferences is simply an instance of this characteristic dual adjustment between definition and usage.... Of course, this interaction is a more complex matter than I have indicated.... Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast.*
>
> In an important sense legal rules are never clear, and, if a rule had to be clear before it could be imposed, society would be impossible. Thus it cannot be said that the legal process is the application of known rules to diverse facts. Yet it is a system of rules; rules are discovered in the process of determining similarity and difference....
>
> The rules change as rules are applied...justifying classification by rules made up as the reasoning or classification proceeds. In a sense all reasoning is like this.... In the long run a circular motion can be seen.... T he rules change from case to case and are remade with each case. Yet this change in the rules is the indispensable dynamic quality of law.... A controversy as to whether the law is certain, unchanging, and expressed in rules, or uncertain, changing, and only a technique for deciding specific cases misses the point. It is both. Edward H. Levi, *Legal Reasoning.*
>
> What one must do in rational inquiry is pull oneself up by one's own bootstraps. We begin by provisionally accepting certain theses whose initial status is not that of certified truths at all, but merely that of plausible postulations, whose role in inquiry (at this stage) is one of regulative facilitation. Eventually these are retrovalidated (retrospectively revalidated) by results of that inquiry.... An inquiry procedure having this overall structure escapes the vitiating cycle of basing truth claims solely upon previously established claims and does so without appeal to a problematic category of self-certifying truths.... T he overall structure of the conduct of scientific inquiry is to be seen as an adversary-proceeding that conforms to the pattern of a dialectical process modeled on disputation. Nicholas Rescher, *Dialectics: A Controversy-Oriented Approach to the Theory of Knowledge.*

I do not mean to imply, by quoting authority or otherwise, that disposing of any of the suggested paradoxes is easy. On the contrary, while we are faced with the evidence of professional practice that rational argument is both possible and productive, it is not at all obvious just how this is the case -- even to practicing professionals; for example: "That the law can be obeyed even when it grows is often more than the legal profession itself can grasp," Cohen and Nagel, *Logic and Scientific Method*, p. 371 .

And whether or not the testimonies cited above appear paradoxical to professional philosophers, there is no reason to suppose that novice students of philosophy are in any position to comprehend them, let alone find them operationally clear and helpful in the actual conduct of moral argument. Accomodating the views and half-truths that give rise to basic paradoxes in moral philosophy calls for some comparative illustration (by analogy with other fields of inquiry) as well as clarification of the epistemological framework(s) and procedures by virtue of which moral-theoretic argument can indeed proceed in the face of its perennial quandries.

5. Epistemological Issues in the Theory and Teaching of Moral Argument

More specific issues to which the paradoxes suggested above naturally lead include the following. Most introductory treatments of moral argument do not give even cursory attention to these crucial issues in the theory of moral argument. None that I know treat the ideal of 'reflective equilibrium' implicit in the previous quotations, the ideal that is arguably the major regulative notion in our philosophic or scientific practice and one about which there is both a wealth of conventional wisdom and on-going dispute in the professional literature--ranging from Nelson Goodman's compendious *Ways of Worldmaking* to critical studies of John Rawls' seminal methodological views in *A Theory of Justice.* If we are to dispel naive relativism without belying the relativity of human theoretical constructs, this seminal notion would seem worth elaborating for students.

- What exactly is the regulative ideal alluded to in the quotations above -- what John Rawls has called the ideal of 'reflective equilibrium'? Can we provide pedagogically clear explanations of the procedures and rationale (epistemology) informing this and cognate regulative ideals?

- What specific procedural analogues can be gleaned from other fields-- like science, the law, logic, or history (a' la Kuhn, Gallie, Toulmin)--that could illuminate the practice of moral philosophy and provide some sense of methodological unity among these fields of normative inquiry?

- In this connection: How might a historical, evolutionary perspective (again, a' la Kuhn, Gallie, Toulmin) illuminate the adjudication of moral-philosophic 'truth' and the proper conduct of moral argument in the timeless and urgent present?

- What are the evidentiary standards and probative criteria presupposed by state-of-the-art practice in moral philosophy?

  - What, after all, counts as evidence or as data in moral argument? What do practicing philosophers accept as such, and why?

  - What role, in particular, do outre' hypothetical cases play as ploys in the adducing of evidence -- counter-examples, paradigm cases, problem cases?

  - What is meant or proven by appeals to 'our' intuitions or 'common (moral) sense'? Is this the final appeal possible in moral disputes? And what happens--or can be done--when my intuitions do not agree with yours?

- To take a popular case in point: When a person argues pro abortion one day and then, say, confronted with a human fetus in a jar, changes his mind . . .

  - What has been adduced in the way of evidence or argument (if anything) to change his mind?

- How might such a presentation (a fetus in a jar, a film of an aborted fetus gasping for breath in a wastebasket...) be construed as carrying evidentiary relevance or probative weight?

- How might such a conversion or change of mind be construed as reasonable or rationally motivated?

- In what ways can moral/normative principles be 'tested' that are analogous to the testing of scientific hypotheses? Or to the review of legal judgments?

  - In what ways are the pervasive gedanken experiments of moral philosophy analogous to the experiments of empirical science?

  - Are 'thought' experiments sufficient for moral inquiry to proceed--or are there other 'harder' forms of data that are relevant or weightier (such as fetuses in jars, vivid pictures, role play, dramatic or pointed factual case studies...)?

  - How, if at all, do these different sources of 'data' provide different sorts or quality of evidence in moral argument?

- In this latter connection (to cite only one):

  - What is the function of imagination and affective factors (sensibilities, feelings) in appraising the evidentiary relevance or weight of any case or consideration offered in moral argument?

  - In what ways does the rationality or competence of moral argumentation allow--or even require--susceptibility and appeal to non-rational factors (sensibilities, feelings)?

II. The Project: Theoretic Tools and Procedural Models for Moral Argument

1. Objectives and Outcomes: Theoretical and Practical

My project is to examine, and make accessible for general students and non-professionals, state-of-the-art theory and practice in moral philosophy; thereby, to make available a larger, more sophisticated complement of theoretical tools and perspectives than is presently found in introductory treatments of moral argument or moral theory; to articulate pedagogically useful procedural models and procedural rationales for the conduct of 'advanced ethical inquiry and theory'; and to compile illustrative materials and available pedagogical devices (e.g., gaming and role-play scenarios) that can facilitate the teaching of moral-theoretic argument in contexts of introductory or applied ethics. The project would build upon my previous curriculum-design and pedagogical work on the introduction of logical rigor into an entry-level core curriculum course in philosophic argument analysis; and it would draw on my own work in moral epistemology and on state-of-the-art moral theory that is presently neglected in introductory texts. The objectives of this study are both theoretical and practical:

A. Theoretical Objectives

1. To de-mystify the moral-theoretic quandries (cited above) that, viewed naively, can create practical impediments to the adjudication, negotiation or mutual adjustment of moral disagreement or conflict; more specifically, to articulate (a) the evidentiary norms and procedures of moral-theoretic argument, (b) their rationales, (c) the larger epistemological frameworks to which we perforce if tacitly appeal in our arguments about what is right and what is wrong--or in arguments about whether such matters are rationally decidable.

2. To provide clear analogues for understanding the regulative ideals, norms and procedures of moral argument: models of inquiry drawn from other fields with established pretentions to the rational resolution of differences (such as science and the law).

3. To investigate, in particular, what might serve as a final 'court' or process of appeal in apparently 'bottom line' moral disputes; grounds and procedures for negotiating basic disagreements in normative matters-- and for negotiating the terms and rules of rational argument.

4. In this latter connection, and with due reference to Rawls and current work on contract theory, to develop my own variation on the social contract model for defining the basic terms and constraints of moral-theoretic argument. The methodological utility of contract theory is among the more important theoretical topics neglected in introductory texts.

5. To investigate the role of NON-rational factors of imagination and sensibility in the conduct of competent moral argument; to put the often confounding conflict and trade-offs between 'reason' and 'emotion' in broader perspective for students.

B. Practical Objectives and Outcomes

1. A book, Moral Argument: Theory and Practice, containing the results of the investigations itemized above, with sustained examples of moral-theoretic argument adapted to major issues in selected fields of applied ethics. The initial fields of application would be those in which there is particular local demand for instruction in applied ethics, namely: ethics and public policy, business ethics, engineering ethics, environmental ethics, and bio-medical ethics. These 'fields' are only roughly definable at best, incorporating dilemmas regarding proper professional conduct as well as broader social-ethical issues. My project would provide selective and sustained illustrations rather than a survey or taxonomy of issues in these fields.

2. A model course, designed as a possible core curriculum offering, in selected topics of applied ethics: (a) emphasizing argumentative procedure and theoretical rigor, and (b) integrating a full complement of state-of-the-art moral theory (including current work in social contract theory and the application of game-theoretic models like the 'Prisoners' Dilemma' to moral argument), in order to complement the usually exclusive focus on traditional utilitarian and Kantian theories.

3. Illustrative materials from other disciplines (e.g., applications of the 'Prisoners' Dilemma' paradigm in behavioral and social-psychological studies, anthropological studies of the social-evolutionary 'rationales' for moral norms that deviate from our own, historic-evolutionary studies of legal and scientific concepts) to illuminate the psychological, social, and historical contexts in which norms of morality and rationality evolve. This sort of illustrative interdisciplinary perspective is helpful both

for informing and constraining one very crucial yet dangerous kind of speculation that perforce attends moral theorizing: speculation about the exigencies of 'the human condition,' human nature, human needs and what, in general, is 'good' for people.

4. A compilation of pedagogical devices (e.g., striking case studies, apt literary material, innovative 'gedanken' experiments, audience-involvement exercises, role-play and gaming scenarios) that have been tried and found useful for facilitating the teaching of moral-theoretic argument in the contexts of introductory or applied ethics.

5. An exploration of possible computer-assist programs that could model and give instructive feed-back on crucial tasks of value-analysis. (E.g., it would be useful to have a machine program that could monitor and report on the consistency with which an individual or group, in assessing the relevant similarities and differences in sets of problem cases, assigns weights or ordinal rankings to the perceived relevant factors: this would provide data not usually available to teachers or students and a basis for analyzing the operative normative principles of the individual or group.) The development of such programs would be a longer-term project, but exploratory investigation would be a natural extention of my work over the last three years in developing and researching computer-assist programs in the logic and tasks of argument analysis (detailed in a FIPSE project report forthcoming in January 1981, partial draft available on request).

2. Background, Commitment, Work Plan

For the past five years I have been working on a core curriculum project that began with a two-year FIPSE grant in 1977, continued under a Lilly Post-Doc Teaching Award Fellowship in 1979, and that will issue in a final report in 1982: the project has resulted in (1) a core curriculum course in logic and philosophic argument analysis, (2) a textbook for same, (3) a package of computer-tutorial programs in formal logic and the analysis of philosophic arguments, (4) a manual and (5) papers explaining the rationale and operations of these innovative programs, (6) a final report on the project which is awaiting the results of this semester's evaluations, (7) a national conference on Logic and Liberal Learning, and (8) a volume of commissioned papers on the conference topic that appeared as a special double issue of the journal *Teaching Philosophy* in July / October 1981.

The main objectives of this project were to identify the basic philosophic and formal-logical tools and techniques for analyzing philosophic arguments and to devise innovative, efficient and effective ways of teaching these tools and techniques. The main and most unpredictably difficult tasks turned out to be defining and teaching the technical logical apparatus that seemed requisite to rigorous philosophic analysis, and defining the heuristic role that formal logic can play (and does play for professional philosophers) in such elusive analytical tasks as 'finding' 'missing' premises in philosophic arguments, especially where the premises in question are crucial normative principles underlying our value and policy judgments.

Now, supposing one can learn to construct and reconstruct arguments and their underlying principles in rigorous logical fashion, and supposing one can then learn various philosophic techniques for supporting or refuting those crucial principles--and students do learn to do

this-- one is still left with one further and very tall order: to argue the merits of one's principles, the crucial premises of one's argument, within and against the larger theoretical frameworks of moral philosophy.

Throughout this project, as the basic techniques, moves and counter-moves of argument analysis became better defined, both students and instructors became increasingly interested in pursuing the larger theoretical dimensions of philosophic argument: but there was neither sufficient time in the course nor adequate accessible materials for teaching the deeper points of moral theory and procedural rationale that would be entailed. Applied yet advanced moral theory demands a course in its own right.

It became clear that equally systematic attention should be given to the theoretical underpinnings of moral argument as to the logic and techniques of argument analysis. The need for offerings in applied ethics, with more attention to moral-theoretic issues and more extensive treatment of selected topics than we can currently give in the present core course, has been apparent for some time. As core course coordinator my proposed answer to these needs and interests is to design a course in applied moral theory and argument that would provide a theoretical and topical complement to the existing course in analytic technique. Such a course would at once address the demand for instruction in applied ethics while promoting high standards of theoretical rigor. To effectively teach such a course one needs materials that make advanced moral theory and epistemology accessible to beginning students. Hence, this proposal.

I have learned a good deal about how to tailor technical, abstract material to fit course time constraints and the untutored philosophic intuitions of beginning students. My ethics and social philosophy courses in the past have always stressed methodological issues and theoretical models in intuitively motivated ways.

I have written a monograph (in submission to the University of Pittsburgh Press), *Reason, Morality, and Self-Interest*, that lays out intuitive grounds and a theoretical apparatus for setting the ultimate terms and constraints of moral-theoretic argument. It elaborates an alternative to Rawls' contract theory and to utilitarian theory, and developes a series of 'gedanken' experiments on the 'Prisoners' Dilemma' model that have proved pedagogically effective with students.

On the basis of a detailed prospectus, I received a contract in late 1976 from Dickenson's philosophy editor for a book on the logic of moral argument. This project was put on a back burner with the inception of the prior FIPSE project, and it has remained there ever since. Meantimes Dickenson was bought up by Wadsworth, who nullified Dickenson's previous contracts but remains interested in the proposed book, which I am now anxious to revive in somewhat more ambitious form.

This is all to say that I have a long-standing interest and some substantial preparation for the present proposed project. The intuitive explication of technical and theoretical matters in ways that are intelligible and compelling to students has been my strong suit as a teacher. As I have incorporated a successful minicourse in logic into the present core course, I believe I could incorporate a successful 'minicore course in the philosophy of science as well as meta-ethics' (to hark to Robert Baum's recommendation in the Hastings Center report) in an introductory course in

applied ethics--one that would provide a useful model and exemplary materials for improving the teaching of theoretical rigor in applied and introductory ethics courses elsewhere.

My work plan would be to begin researching relevant materials and to develop an initial course plan during the summer of 1983, in order to offer a proto-type course in the core curriculum next year. Building on my previous research on the theoretical agenda of moral argument, I would prepare the initial printed text materials this summer and supplement them during the fall semester, when I would plan to be fully involved in the teaching of the first version of the model course.

I've applied for release time for second semester of 1983-84, and summer support for the following summer to devote full time to producing a complete first draft of the proposed book and to collecting illustrative pedagogical materials for dissemination and more polished presentation in the subsequently revised course the following fall of 1984.

Since my work on this project will benefit our local curriculum and given my role as core course coordinator, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences will provide me with quarter-time release in the second semester of 1983-84. This would comprise half the total release time requested for the academic year. Because the text and materials developed for the project would also be of direct benefit to our local course, the college will supply the computer text-processing facilities and computer time to produce these materials in disseminable printed form. My department will supply half the requested secretarial time for a secretary familiar with the text-processing programs and equipment here. I have requested funds to help defray the costs of materials like paper and postage. As in all such projects, the hardest resource to come by is concentrated time for writing and materials-design; hence, the larger share of the request is for release time from other academic and summer jobs.

3. Projected Impact: Needs and Audience Addressed

The proposed book on the theory and practice of moral argument should prove accessible, useful and innovative for the teaching of applied ethics as well as for other courses in moral, social-political, and legal philosophy, and even general or advanced courses in epistemology and theory of rational argumentation. The resulting course should prove a model for integrating theoretical and argumentative rigor in applied ethics and social policy curricula. A compilation of available pedagogical innovations and relevant materials from other disciplines should be useful to anyone planning such a course who wishes to stress the larger theoretical issues on the introductory level.

There is a continuing need in philosophy and philosophy courses that wish to avoid methodological myopia or bias, to explore alternatives to utilitarian theory: specifically, along the lines of the social contract models prominent in the work of John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Contract theory holds promise not only as an alternative normative theory to utilitarianism, but also as a procedural model for moral-epistemological inquiry. My proposed study would explore this promise, in ways that would make recent theoretical developments in moral and social philosophy accessible to beginning students.

In the teaching of moral and social-political philosophy, there is a need for theoretically advanced and pedagogically innovative work on how rational moral argument proceeds, and on issues relating to the possibility of negotiating differences on moral and moral-theoretic matters. No text I know that is written in a way accessible to beginning students goes far enough into these issues or the theory required to address them. I cannot say that my attempt will be adequate to the task, but I imagine that such an attempt will be as welcome as it is overdue.

The audience to be served by the outcomes of this project includes: students of applied ethics, moral, social-political and legal philosophy (whether they are typical undergraduates, graduates in professional programs, or general adult learners); philosophers in these fields; college or professional-school teachers not in philosophy who are concerned with the teaching of ethics; teachers and students in public policy studies where the assessment of social policy must at some point hark to rigorous standards of moral-theoretic argument.