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Truth and Reconciliation: Comments on Coalescence

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Title: Truth and reconciliation: comments on coalescence
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In his book, *Coalescent Argumentation*, Michael Gilbert offers criticisms of the traditional dialectical or Critical-Logical Model of argumentation (C-L) which he claims is dominant in contemporary theory and pedagogy, and proposes, as an alternative, a theory of coalescent argumentation. Gilbert criticizes C-L on the grounds that it is excessively narrow, that it treats arguments a-contextually, that it is negative and fault-finding, and that it aims at truth. In contrast, coalescent argumentation widens the scope of what is considered argumentation; it views arguments in the context of the web of beliefs, needs, wants and feelings in which they are embedded; it focuses on agreement; and it aims at the reconciliation of views.

In this paper I examine the dispute between the C-L and coalescent models and I attempt to do this using the coalescent approach. I do this in order : 1) to avoid examining Gilbert's view by means of the very method which is the object of his criticisms, 2) to attempt to better understand the coalescent model and how it differs in practice from C-L, and 3) to see what are the strengths and limitations of the coalescent approach. Thus the paper will operate at two levels, both engaging in the argumentative exchange, and at a meta-level, commenting on the process and the challenges it presents.

1. Criticisms of the Critical-Logical Model

The first step is to outline Gilbert's position. Since he sets up his own theory in contrast to C-L, I shall begin by describing the ways in which he views the latter as problematic. A number of his criticisms arise from his view that C-L does not do justice to actual argumentation among real people in real contexts. Thus he argues that C-L, in viewing argumentation as a linear, precise, and contained procedure which requires refinement and distillation from actual discourse, is excessively narrow, precluding many aspects of actual arguments, for example emotional or intuitional aspects. He faults C-L for precluding that which is not linguistically explicit or explicable, arguing that the message in argumentative communication is not contained solely in the words.

Several of his points of criticism stem from disagreement with some of the epistemological assumptions behind C-L, most having their root in feminist critiques. Thus Gilbert is critical of C-L for putting almost total emphasis on arguments as artifacts as opposed to on the process of argumentation and for viewing the situation of the arguers as irrelevant to the evaluation of arguments. Gilbert accepts the feminist view that argument is among people and not between theories and that it is impossible to separate the argument from the arguers and the context. In ignoring the context, the goals of the arguers, and the aims of the interaction as a whole, C-L ignores aspects which are crucial to the understanding of arguments.

Another feminist criticism of C-L which Gilbert takes up is that it is a negative and competitive enterprise, concerned with finding fault with and defeating arguments rather than with understanding, agreement, and the reconciliation of views. "The aim is to eliminate the presented argument so that one's own argument can take its place along with the accompanying view" (Gilbert 1997: 43).

Behind many of Gilbert's criticisms of C-L lies a basic objection to its epistemological goal in aiming for the true or correct position. He rejects, in fact, the view of reality which accepts rigorous true/false and right/wrong dichotomies and which holds that the best position will be the one to survive a 'properly conducted rational, competitive inquiry'. Truth is not evident on its face, there are many factors which contribute to whether an argument prevails, and, because of the complexity of most issues, no single

view will contain the whole truth or the right answer.

It is important to note that Gilbert claims that he is not arguing that the approach to argumentation advocated in C- L, i.e., rational analysis, is inappropriate, useless, or misguided, but rather that it is problematic when taken as the exclusive way in which argumentation should be viewed.

2. Coalescent Argumentation

As an alternative to C-L, Gilbert offers a new theory of argumentation which he claims avoids the problems of C-L by doing justice to actual argumentation and by being more inclusive. In contrast to the dialectical approach of C-L, Gilbert characterizes his approach as rhetorical. As such it focuses on the communication which occurs in dissensual frameworks. Argument is defined as "any exchange of information centered on an avowed disagreement" (Gilbert 1997: 104). The coalescent approach is not normative in the way C-L is, that is it does not specify in advance what will count as argument, but is based instead on what actually goes on in real argumentation. Thus it allows in alternative modes of reasoning, including emotional, physical and intuitional aspects which are ruled out by C-L.

The coalescent approach is built on the recognition that all argumentative communication is situated. Thus it considers arguments in the context of a larger picture of beliefs, needs, wants, feelings, and purposes. The focus is on understanding particular arguments as representative of richer situated positions.

One of the most important features of coalescent argumentation is that it aims not at truth nor even the 'best justified' position, but rather at consensus. The final goal is agreement and a reconciliation of the contending positions. It builds on concern for the dispute partner's needs, wants, attitudes and beliefs and involves each attempting to understand why the other holds the position she does. There is an emphasis on agreement and finding mutual ground, on identifying the real sources of disagreement, and on attempting to reconcile or bypass the remaining points of disagreement.

Because of these differences in orientation, the coalescent approach focuses on certain aspects of the argumentative exchange which are not generally considered in C-L. One of these is the goals of participants, including task goals (the immediate strategic object of the encounter), face goals (which concern the relationship between participants), and motives (more general, deep-seated goals, including hidden or dark side goals). In order to reach agreement, there is a need to maximize the number of satisfied goals on each side in all these categories.

The coalescent approach also views argumentation as multi-modal, giving consideration to various modes of argumentation in addition to the logical. Thus the emotional mode (which relates to the realm of feeling), the visceral mode (which stems from the physical), and the kisceral mode (which is intuitive and non-sensory) are all considered legitimate modes of argumentation. Gilbert argues that these modes do allow for backing and warrants and can be evaluated by the traditional criteria of relevance, sufficiency, and acceptability, although what these will mean will vary according to the particular mode.

Coalescent argumentation is "the joining together of two disparate claims through recognition and exploration of opposing positions," (Gilbert 1997: 102) and the actual process involves various procedures. These include: 1) exposing and exploring the positions of the dispute partners including the identification of the goals of each; 2) finding points of commonality between the positions; and 3)

merging positions by beginning from points of commonality and exploring various means of maximizing the goals that apparently are in conflict. This process would include an examination of the modes of reasoning used by the participants.

3. Applying the Coalescent Approach

3.1 Challenges and Limitations

The next step involves examining the dispute between the C-L and coalescent approaches in the manner suggested by the coalescent approach. Attempting to apply the coalescent approach in this context presents a number of difficulties, however. The prototype of argumentation for Gilbert seems to be a live, dialogical exchange between two people in the context of a disagreement. None of these conditions seems to fit neatly the type of argumentation which is being engaged in here. First, the argumentative exchange has not (until now) transpired face-to-face. Thus the possibility of examining the kinds of alternative modes (for example emotional or visceral) which Gilbert wants included is limited. In addition, because the argumentation has not been directly dialogical (until now), the kind of immediate interaction which carries the coalescent approach forward can take place in only a limited form. As a significant portion of argumentation takes place via extended and complex written arguments and responses, the question arises as to how well the coalescent approach can accommodate this type of argumentation.

Another difficulty in attempting to apply the coalescent approach in this context is that CA seems to be designed for contexts of dispute-resolution. I would, however, characterize the situation here as one of inquiry rather than dispute. Thus it is not entirely clear whether my role should be that of a third party inquiring into the dispute between C-L and CA, or that of one of the disputants. Given that it is not obvious how (or whether) the coalescent approach can be applied to third party adjudication, and given that I do hold some version of C-L, I shall take the role of dispute partner. Nonetheless my intention is to explore and attempt to understand the coalescent approach in order to decide, in the end, what view I want to hold, in other words, to inquire. The issue of how well CA applies to cases of inquiry will be examined in detail later.

3.2 Exposing Goals

One of the first steps in coalescent argumentation is to examine the goals of both partners, including task goals, face goals, and motives. I would understand Gilbert's immediate strategic goal in writing his book to be to propose an alternative view of argumentation and to convince/persuade the audience of his position (he does not accept the distinction between the two).

I imagine that his deeper intellectual goals or motives involve wanting to propose an approach to argumentation which fits with his value commitments, that is, one which is more inclusive and which offers the possibility of a peaceful resolution to disagreement. He also, I believe, wants to offer a view of argumentation which accords with his epistemological and metaphysical commitments, that is, one which is based in a constructivist epistemology and a pragmatic view of philosophy.

With respect to face goals, Gilbert would have to have some personal investment in maintaining and defending his view because presumably he believes it is correct or at least a good view in some sense. But he might also have an investment in exemplifying his view by not attempting to show that it is correct, but rather by attempting to reach agreement with those who disagree with it.

With respect to my own goals, my task goal in this paper is to try to examine the coalescent approach by attempting to use it, to see how it differs from C-L, and to decide what aspects I might want to accept. The deeper intellectual context in which my inquiry is situated involves a fallibilist epistemology with its attendant normative view of argumentation. I share Gilbert's belief that argumentation ought to be inclusive although I would not agree with his construal of what is required by that inclusivity. I also share his goal of argumentation as an alternative to violence.

My face goals would include trying to write an academically and intellectually credible paper and trying to convince the audience of the points I make in the paper. I also doubtless have some personal investment in defending my initial position as well as an investment in displaying the kind of open-mindedness which is entailed by my position and the kind of openness to reconciliation which is required by Gilbert's. In addition, to the extent that I criticize or disagree with Gilbert's points, I will have as a face goal to do so in a manner which contributes to or at least does not disrupt the maintenance of our friendship.

3.3 Exploring Positions

A major component of coalescent argumentation involves exploring the positions of the dispute partners. As I have already described Gilbert's position as I see it and described C-L as Gilbert sees it, the next step is to examine the nature of the disagreement between the two views. I shall attempt to determine which points of disagreement are real and which only apparent, and what are the points of commonality between the views.

First, I believe that some of the points of divergence are more apparent than real, and that, in these respects there is more in common between CA and C-L than may at first appear. For example, Gilbert criticizes C-L for viewing argumentation as a linear, precise and contained procedure and failing to recognize its more chaotic, non-algorithmic, and imprecise aspects. Such a conception of argumentation as linear and precise is not universally accepted by argumentation theorists, however (Blair & Johnson 1987b). Numerous theorists have recognized the difficulties of capturing arguments in schematized form (Gutteridge 1987; Scott 1987), have acknowledged the role of imagination and judgment in interpreting, evaluating, and constructing arguments (Berg 1987; Scriven 1976; Blair & Johnson 1987a; Johnson & Blair 1983), and have argued that argument criticism has a creative dimension (Bailin 1990; Scriven 1976). Thus C-L and CA are somewhat closer in this respect than Gilbert's description might indicate. Nonetheless, CA and C-L would differ with respect to the inclusion of emotional, visceral, and intuitive aspects. The nature of this difference will be dealt with later.

The CA and C-L views also appear initially to differ with respect to the consideration of contextual aspects of argumentation. Gilbert claims that C-L, unlike CA, ignores the context of the argument, the goals of the arguers, and the aims of the interaction. Yet there are ways in which C-L can take context into account. Any rich view of argumentation will view particular arguments not as isolated entities but rather in the context of a larger dialectical process of belief formation and testing (Blair & Johnson 1987a), and the criteria of argument evaluation will be interpreted in the context of this process.[1] Thus particular arguments will be viewed as representative of richer positions, and an important aspect of the process of argumentation will be to probe the assumptions behind the arguments, investigate the positions in which they are embedded and try to become clearer about the nature and goals of the arguments. This kind of consideration of context is, I would argue, already an important aspect of many versions of C-L.

An upholder of C-L can also acknowledge the need to take the context of the arguer into account with respect to the dialogical argumentative exchange. Thus someone of the C-L persuasion can (and, I would argue, should) acknowledge the importance of being sensitive to the feelings of one's dispute partner and of considering the commitments, motivation, and intellectual context of the other arguers when framing a response or next move in an argumentative exchange. And Gilbert is justifiably concerned that this does not always happen, and that such an omission can be profoundly alienating and exclusionary to some people. Such a consideration of context relates to the actual communicative exchange between the dispute partners, however, and not to the logic of the argument itself (Miller 1995). Being sensitive to the feelings and context of the arguers does not preclude evaluating their

arguments according to critical criteria. The fact that I may cease arguing my position in an argument if the exchange becomes too fractious does not mean that I therefore accept the opposing position. I have withdrawn from the argumentative exchange, but my evaluation of the arguments may not have altered. As another example, the fact that Michael Gilbert is my friend may affect the manner of my presentation, but it should not cause me to agree with him or to overlook objections I may have to his position.

Thus there are some important ways in which C-L does and can take into account context and thus can go some way toward meeting some of Gilbert's concerns. Nonetheless C-L does indeed rest on the possibility of separating the argument from particular arguers in some sense, and this is a point clearly rejected in the coalescent approach. C-L assumes that there is an important distinction between arguments and the process of argumentation. Individuals deploy or construct arguments in particular contexts, but such arguments are in some sense public products or artifacts which exist within a dialectical tradition and form part of a public conversation. Arguments, like chairs, are human constructions, made by particular people for particular purposes and used by particular people for particular purposes, and there are contexts in which these aspects are important. Nonetheless, they are both still public products and we can use them, interact with them, and analyse their properties. We can talk about arguments outside the context of particular arguers, for example, the deterrent argument for capital punishment, various scientific arguments, or even the arguments for C-L which Gilbert criticizes (he does not refer to the arguments of particular individuals, rather he argues against a position). And such arguments can be critiqued, at least to some extent, apart from the circumstances, feelings and motivations of particular arguers. It is true that arguments are embedded in world views and an understanding of the world view is vital for interpretation and evaluation of the argument. So a view which focuses on arguments need not view arguments apart from any context whatsoever. Rather, they can be viewed in the context of broader social and cultural conversations and not simply in the context of individual disagreements.

Gilbert also portrays C-L as a negative, competitive enterprise aimed at defeating opposing arguments in contrast with CA which aims at understanding, agreement, and the reconciliation of views. This apparent contrast rests to some extent on an inaccurate portrayal of C-L, however. It is the case that C-L has often been practised in a combative manner, with defeat of the opposing position and winning the argument as goals. But this is precisely the contrary to what is intended by C-L. The aim of C-L is not to defeat the opposing argument but rather to concede to the strongest argument, whoever proposes it. C-L is not about winning but rather about being open to "the possibility of being obligated to lose." (Oldenquist 1982: 183). C-L aims at finding the best justified position and this will involve understanding opposing arguments, challenging reasons and evidence, accepting some aspects, rejecting others, reformulating claims, investigating alternatives, and, in the end, arriving at a view which takes into account the strengths and weaknesses of the various arguments and synthesizes the strongest aspects into a new and coherent whole (Bailin 1992). I think that most C-L theorists would agree with Gilbert that "positions ... almost always involve some right, some wrong, some good and some bad" (Gilbert 1997: 64) and that "no single view has, in all likelihood, the truth or the right answer" (Gilbert 1994: 112). Thus

the aim is not defeat but rather reconciliation, insofar as is possible, of the best justified aspects of the various views.

There is, then, an important sense in which reconciliation is an aim for both CA and C-L. Nonetheless reconciliation seems to be construed differently in the two approaches. For C-L, the aim is not reconciliation *per se*, but rather reconciliation of the best justified aspects. The ultimate goal for C-L is not consensus but rather truth (or at least justification as its surrogate). I am not at all clear, however, about where Gilbert stands with respect to truth and justification. One the one hand, he is critical of a rigorous true/false dichotomy and rejects truth as the goal of argumentation. On the other hand, he does refer to the truth or falsity of views (arguing, for example, that no single view has all the truth, and that some false views have survived). This is a crucial point because it is connected with one of the salient

some false views have survived). This is a crucial point because it is connected with one of the salient issues between C-L and CA, that is, the role of argument evaluation. Again, I am not clear on where Gilbert stands with respect to the evaluation of arguments. Although he claims that he is not rejecting the techniques of argument evaluation provided by C-L, nowhere in his description of the methods of CA is there an explicit reference to the evaluation of the arguments under discussion. It may be that evaluation is implicit in the stage of exploration of positions (which is the approach that I have taken). But could not the dispute partners explore without ever engaging in rational evaluation? Nothing in CA as described seems to preclude this possibility. Indeed, since the goal is not truth but consensus, it does seem that consensus could be reached without such evaluation. And since the goal is not truth, it is not clear to me what role evaluation could play. It does seem to be the case that disputants could agree to bad arguments (by C-L criteria). A white supremacist could, for example, persuade an initially skeptical dispute partner of the existence of a global Jewish conspiracy based on the fact that there are many Jewish business owners and politicians and that such a conspiracy is described in a neo-nazi tract. Provided that the disputants examine goals and positions, find points of commonality, and merge positions to reach consensus, I do not see what resources CA provides for being critical of this exchange as a model of argumentation.

In response to the objection that CA makes all arguments negotiations, Gilbert does suggest that determining the truth of a proposition or value of a solution may be a highly prioritized motive on the part of one or both dispute partners. He seems to be suggesting here that truth is a goal of argumentation only when it is highly prioritized by the disputants. Even if that were the case, the fact that truth is a highly prioritized value for philosophers would seem to provide at least some justification for philosophers taking a normative view of argumentation and focusing on this aspect in our classes. C-L theorists would, of course, not accept this type of limited and relativistic role for truth and would argue that we all, *qua* rational people, ought to prioritize truth and that its importance is not diminished by the fact that its centrality may not be recognized by particular individuals in particular cases. The particular goals of individuals seem to be taken as given in the CA approach, yet goals can also be evaluated. We can try to convince people that there are good reasons for altering some of their goals.

This issue regarding evaluation also arises with respect to the alternative modes of argumentation which are included by CA. Gilbert argues that modes such as the emotional, visceral, and kisceral should be considered not merely as part of the communicative context of argumentation, but as aspects of the argument itself. Thus, for example, in an argument about a business deal, someone's intuitive distrust of an individual may constitute a reason for not making the deal. Or an individual's emotional expression of love may constitute a legitimate move in an argument regarding the continuation of the relationship. Now I think that a C-L theorist could accept some version of this claim. I am convinced by Gilbert's arguments that the intuitive and emotional aspects described in the preceding examples do constitute legitimate aspects of the content of the arguments. They could constitute reasons relevant to

arriving at a conclusion. The salient question for me is whether they constitute good reasons. In the example of the business deal, it may be that I have shown myself in the past to be a very good judge of character, and so my intuition may constitute a good reason not to trust the person in question. On the other hand, I may be paranoid and not trust anyone, or my past intuitions regarding trustworthiness may not have proven very dependable, in which cases my intuition would not constitute a strong reason. Similarly, although an emotional expression of love may appear to constitute a relevant reason in the relationship case, it may be that the person in question has shown himself in the past to be capable of mustering expressions of love when required but his previous actions have not shown such expressions to have any substance. These alternative modes can, then, be evaluated according to rational criteria. Elgin argues, for example, that emotions are subject to public evaluation (for example someone can be criticized for being unjustifiably angry or credited for being rightly resentful), that there are standards for such assessment (including the appropriateness of the emotion to context), that we can challenge and defend our assessments by argument, and that we often achieve consensus regarding such

defend our assessments by argument, and that we often achieve consensus regarding such assessments (Elgin 1996: 159). I believe that a C-L theorist could allow in expressions in alternative modes insofar as they are assessable according to such rational criteria.

Gilbert does allow for the assessment of these alternative modes, but I am not clear about how he views the nature of this assessment. He does say that these modes can have backing, warrants, data and claims in ways isomorphic to logical arguments, that they can be used properly or improperly, and that the traditional C-L criteria of relevance, sufficiency, and acceptability (RSA) can be utilized in their assessment. But he also states that "each of the modes can define, for itself, relevance, sufficiency, and acceptability" (Gilbert 1997: 97) and that "It [the RSA triad] is filled in by the mode that is operative at the time, each containing within it its own criteria, experts, and foundational beliefs" (Gilbert 1997: 98-99). This seems to indicate that the assessment is completely relative to the particular mode. Let us take as an example an argument between an astrologer and a skeptic regarding a financial decision. The astrologer argues that they should not make the decision today as the position of the planets is not favourable. The skeptic argues that the position of the planets is irrelevant to the making of such decisions. However for the astrologer, who is an expert in the area and is making his judgment on the basis of astrological criteria grounded in the foundational beliefs of astrology, the position of the planets is relevant. Would Gilbert argue that the position of the planets is irrelevant for the skeptic but relevant for the astrologer? The following statement of his indicates that he might: "It is not the concern of an argumentation theorist to judge the validity of such sources [astrology, Bible quotations, channeling etc,], but rather to understand their use in argumentative interactions" (Gilbert 1997: 88). Such a totally relativistic interpretation of the criteria of argument assessment would not be acceptable to C-L.

One of the issues which distinguishes C-L and CA and which underlies some of the other differences concerns the focus and purposes of argumentation. Gilbert's prototype of argumentation seems to be a dialogical exchange between two people for the purpose of resolving a disagreement. And many of the examples he uses, e.g., a couple arguing over where to spend their holidays or over who is to have use of the car, involve primarily a conflict of goals. The coalescent approach fits well in such contexts since it is not a question of determining the truth but rather of finding a resolution which satisfies the real goals of both parties. I think that C-L theorists would have no problem in accepting the applicability of CA in such contexts. Not all arguments are of this kind, however. The focus of many arguments is not disagreement but rather inquiry, which Blair defines as "an investigation into whether a questioned or problematic point of view is acceptable" (Blair 1987: 193). Arguments often involve not simply attempting to find a *modus vivendi*, but rather attempting to find out what is the most reasonable belief to hold or action to take. Claims from various positions are examined, tested, and adjusted in order to arrive at the best justified position. Moreover argumentation focused on inquiry does not necessarily

involve two individuals engaged in a dispute. It may also be undertaken by one person attempting to resolve a puzzlement or several people exploring an issue, and individuals may even share or exchange roles (Bailin 1992: 65). Such argumentation does centre on disagreement, but the disagreement may arise from the incompatibility of views (Blair 1987) rather than from a conflict between two individuals. What is more, reaching consensus may not even be a desired goal for this type of argumentation. Exploration for understanding may be the object. And even when a conclusion is required in order for action to be taken, a fallibilist epistemological stance would imply that such conclusions are likely temporary resting places and that exploration will be a continually ongoing process. Moreover, Popper has argued persuasively that there is epistemological merit in the mutual challenge between opposing views.

The coalescent approach does not seem to fit well with argument focused on inquiry, but it is a central kind of argumentation, and probably the kind of most interest for C-L. In fact, I have argued elsewhere that, from an epistemological perspective, inquiry is the model of argumentation (Bailin 1992). Moreover, I believe that most of the issues of contention between C-L and CA, regarding, for example,

Moreover, I believe that most of the issues of contention between C-L and CA, regarding, for example, the consideration of the context of the arguer, the aims of truth versus consensus, and the nature and place of evaluation, arise in the context of this difference.

Gilbert does acknowledge the existence of inquiry as a type of argumentation, but seems to minimize its importance as an aspect to be considered in the CA approach. He argues, for example, that inquiry may sometimes be a highly prioritized goal by some disputants, but that even here it will always have a persuasion and/or bias component. Pure inquiry is relatively rare and not easily accomplished since we are rarely detached from the outcomes of our inquiries. Inquiry is always a matter of degree, with arguments always containing some degree of eristic as well as heuristic content. Given these points, Gilbert seems to give very little attention to inquiry but focuses instead on the eristic dimensions of argumentation.

I believe that, from a C-L perspective, one could agree completely with Gilbert that we, as arguers, always come from certain perspectives, always have face goals and strategic goals in engaging in argumentation, frequently bring particular biases to our arguments, and rarely, if ever, engage in pure, untainted inquiry. These are important points which Gilbert raises, and he performs a useful service in reminding us as argumentation theorists that it is real, embodied, embedded, and contextual human beings who are engaging in the process of argumentation. I would argue, however, that the fact that we have biases and may rarely engage in pure inquiry does not mean that we should minimize the role of inquiry nor abandon it as an aim. It plays a crucial role as an ideal, and as such functions much like other ideals such as justice. It is probably the case that we rarely, if ever, act perfectly justly and that our societies will likely never be perfectly just. This does not mean, however, that we should abandon justice as an ideal. Rather we make efforts to make ourselves and our societies more just. Similarly we can make efforts to make ourselves and our students more inquiry-oriented.

I also think that Gilbert underestimates the extent to which inquiry does take place (even if it is not perfectly pure) and the extent to which people do have inquiry as a goal and are motivated by a search for truth. He seems to portray inquiry as dispassionate, implying that if one has truth as a goal, then one is detached from the outcome of the inquiry. But people are often very emotionally committed to the search for truth and care passionately that the outcome of an inquiry be the best justified. And such 'rational passions' as love of truth, repugnance of distortion and evasion, and respect for the arguments of others (Peters 1972) can be fostered. Although the coalescent approach is grounded in how people actually argue, it is also explicitly normative in trying to affect how they conduct their disagreements and

getting them to do so in a more productive way. So, rather than accepting disagreement as the starting point of argumentation and attempting to change how people disagree, why not try to affect people's orientation toward argumentation and promote inquiry rather than disagreement? And such a focus on argumentation as co-operative inquiry is, perhaps, even more consistent with feminist concerns for co-operation than is a focus on disagreement. I suspect that Gilbert would counter that the problem with this approach is that it does not deal with the non-inquiry goals which individuals will bring to the argumentative situation and thus does not provide a realistic approach with any chance of success. I think that one of the greatest strengths of the coalescent approach is in recognizing the multiplicity of goals which arguers may have in any particular argumentative situation. But I propose that acknowledging and dealing with these goals in the context of the communicative dimension of argumentation might deal with this concern without minimizing the importance of the search for truth.

3.4 Reconciliation

The final stage of CA involves merging the positions in an effort to reach consensus. Thus I shall summarize the ways in which I think there is some reconciliation possible between C-L and CA as well as some of the issues which I believe are still outstanding. I think that both CA and C-L recognize the

non-algorithmic and creative dimension to argumentation and the difficulty of capturing arguments schematically in any neat and unproblematic way. I think that neither approach is about winning or defeating the opposing view and both are grounded in an attempt to understand opposing arguments. Both involve taking into account the larger dialectical context and examining the assumptions and world views in which particular arguments are embedded. And both aim at reconciliation, at least in some sense. I also believe that there is room in C-L for acknowledging the need to take into account the context and goals of particular arguers as elements of the communicate dimension of argumentation, and that this move goes some way toward incorporating some of the concerns addressed by CA and of bringing the positions closer together.

I believe that there are, however, still some significant differences between C-L and CA, largely having to do with the focus and goals of argumentation. The focus of CA is the resolution of interpersonal disagreement. Thus it views arguments as inseparable from particular arguers and seeks consensus as its goal. C-L, on the other hand, recognizes inquiry as a central form of argumentation and thus recognizes the possibility of viewing arguments apart from particular arguers and has truth as its goal.

Questions still remain for me regarding how the nature and role of argument evaluation compare in the two views. Is the evaluation of arguments, including alternative modes, according to non-relative rational criteria an integral and required aspect of the coalescent approach? If not, then this constitutes a significant difference between CA and C-L. If so, then the two approaches are much closer than may at first appear.

4. Reflections on the Process

Finally, I shall return to my meta-level analysis and reflect briefly on the process of attempting to use the coalescent approach. First, there are some ways in which my approach to the task differed somewhat from what it might have been coming from a strictly C-L perspective. Using C-L, I likely would not have undertaken an examination of goals. And I think having to make explicit my own strategic and face goals caused me to try especially hard to restrain any initial biases I may have had. It also made me more aware of the rhetorical goals I had in writing the paper and thus made me especially attentive to the communicative dimension of my presentation, to the audience I was addressing and to what I was hoping to achieve. I also think that I focused more on finding and explicating the points of agreement and commonality between the two positions than I might otherwise have done (although I certainly would have done it to some extent). Finally, I think that my attempt to use the coalescent approach affected somewhat the tone of my comments, making them a little more conciliatory and less confrontational than they otherwise might have been. On the other hand, I think that much of what I did in the paper in terms of examining claims, seeking clarification, exploring deeper positions, probing assumptions, looking for points of commonality, and trying to reconcile the strongest points of each, is not very different from what I would have done using strictly C-L. Now this may be because what I have done here does not really reflect the coalescent approach (either because CA does not fit this context well or because I relapsed into my C-L ways). Or it may be because the two approaches are, in many significant ways, not all that different after all.

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Endnotes

[1] Johnson & Blair (1983) claim, for example, that premise acceptability is a dialectical matter which must be determined with an imagined audience in mind and in light of the purposes at hand.