The Coalescent Model of Argumentation: An Examination of its Foundation and Application

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Abstract

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Abstract: This thesis explicates and evaluates the Coalescent Model of argumentation, as advanced by Michael A. Gilbert. The Coalescent Model represents a conception of argument which subscribes to the view that argument is a human communicative device centered on the disagreement between dispute partners. The adequacy of this conception will be evaluated. I contend that Gilbert's definition of argument is inadequate, as it disregards methods of persuasion as central to argument. In addition, the arguments supporting the normative theory of Coalescence, which posits agreement as the goal of argument, will be appraised. I argue that Gilbert mischaracterizes the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation, and that agreement is not sufficient as the final goal of argument. Lastly, the moral argument in favour of a Coalescent approach to argument will be considered and criticised on the grounds that it relies on equivocating 'modes of communication' with 'modes of reasoning'.

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Chapter One
"What Is Argument?"

One enduring question that an argumentation theorist must address as a primary matter in any piece of academic writing is “What is argument?” Depending on whom one poses this question to, there are a variety of anticipated responses. For example, a student in high school may characterize an argument as a verbal fight between two people, while a university student may characterize an argument as any speech act that involves the statement of a position and at least one piece of evidence for supporting that particular position.

Within the discipline of Argumentation Theory, a consensus has not been reached on the matter of an acceptable definition of ‘argument’. This lack of agreement has the potential to cause many problems within the discipline, namely for the reason that whatever particular human behaviour and communication that is studied by a theorist will be largely dictated by the classification of such behaviour as argument, negotiation, brawling, or any other array of human behaviour. So, in other words, an argumentation theorist must first know what an argument is before he can isolate it within human behaviour, and then make study and comment on it.

Michael A. Gilbert, within his numerous articles, and especially in his book entitled Coalescent Argumentation, has explicated a concept of argument. However, before Gilbert’s construction is presented, it may be helpful to review some of the other definitions of argument in the field.
1 1 Defining Argument

As mentioned above, the conception of argument used will in a significant way set the parameters of study for an argumentation theorist. With this in mind, it is no great wonder that those theorists who write conflicting accounts of argumentation usually rely on incompatible accounts of the term ‘argument’. In this section I will describe three main ideologies that have contributed to the discipline of argumentation theory and describe the separate, yet intrinsically related, conceptions of argument that are imbedded in each of the sub-theories\(^1\). These three main ideologies are: the Dialectical view, the Rhetorical view, and the Ordinary view.

1.1.1 The Dialectical View

The Dialectical View of argument most closely resembles the conception of argument which is traditionally presented in a philosophy course on critical thinking. The epitome of this view is summarized by the Informal Logicians Ralph Johnson, J. Anthony Blair, and Trudy Govier. In “Argumentation as Dialectical”, Johnson and Blair propose that argument is a dialectical process that involves both the presentation of a position and the offering and answering of questions relevant to the acceptance of a proposition.\(^2\) Similarly, Govier defines an argument as “...a piece of discourse or writing in which someone tries to convince others (or himself) of the truth of a claim by citing reasons on its behalf.”\(^3\)

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\(^1\) The characterization of these theories will be taken from Gilbert’s work. It is not the case that I agree with all aspects of his characterizations, and will address that issue at a latter time.


These two definitions, which will be combined to formulate the Dialectical view, indicate a specific sense of the term ‘argument’. The idea that an argument must be a linguistic activity (or at least linguistically explicable) is prominent in this view. Argument is considered to be something that involves the use of reason, which manifests itself in the form of at least one premise in support of a position which can be communicated in terms of a proposition. This notion of argument as a reasoned activity allows the Dialectician to inspect a communication for a rational component—thus; an argument is something that can be extracted from other elements of a communication, which can be seen as non-rational communication. This extraction allows one to examine the structure and force of an argument. For example, take the following dialogue:

Stacy: I am so angry! I just got my Epistemology paper back and I only got a C. Can you believe that? I mean, I worked incredibly hard—I must have put a good four hours of work into this stupid thing. My mom is going to kill me when she sees my marks this semester. That’s it! I am going to go to my professor’s office and tell her that she needs to change my grade. Surely she must have made a mistake—a paper that is complete with a bibliography and end notes is worth more than a C.

Melissa: Sounds like you have a case! I’ll go with you.

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4 The Amsterdam school of Pragma-Dialectics led by Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst has been identified as a relative to the Dialectical view due to the emphasis placed on reasons. However, the emphasis placed on actual communicative encounters somewhat relates the Pragma-Dialecticians to the Rhetoricians. The School of Pragma-Dialectics will not be explicitly discussed in this work.

5 The use of the term ‘non-rational’ is intended to merely refer to elements in conversation that are not necessary or related to the arguer’s effort to persuade a listener (or reader) of a position through the presentation of reasons or premises (perhaps what is ‘non-rational’ can be roughly equivocated with ‘logically extraneous’). Non-rational should not be taken to refer to human behavior or communication that is or could be considered unintelligent.
This conversation, according to the doctrine of the Dialectical view, contains an argument. To attain a position where this argument can be evaluated, it must first be extracted from the conversation in which it occurred. The extracted argument would resemble the following:

**Premise 1**: Students who have worked hard deserve a better mark than ‘C’.

**Premise 2**: Papers that are complete with both a bibliography and end notes section are worth more than a ‘C’ grade.

**Premise 3**: I worked hard on my paper.

**Premise 4**: My paper contained both a bibliography and an end notes section.

**Conclusion**: My paper deserves a better grade than ‘C’.

So, what originally appeared to be a conversation pertaining to dissatisfaction with a grade actually imbedded an argument. Now that this argument has been identified and written in a clear and linear format, it can be evaluated. The evaluation will be based on how well this argument followed the rules set forth by Informal Logic. For example, one might identify the truth of certain premises in the argument as questionable, and thus the soundness of the argument may be called into question. As Gilbert writes: “…the natural argument must be stripped and refined in order that the “underlying argument” be exposed. In other words […] the “real argument” is something that is ideally presented in a clear and linear fashion,\(^6\) and, at worst, must be extricated from the mare’s nest of emotional and psychological debris in which it is found.”\(^7\)

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\(^6\) ‘Linear’ in this sense refers to writing an argument in a form that shows premises and conclusions.

The attention paid to refining arguments from their original, more disorganized form, "...relies heavily on the analysis of components, and invariably winnows arguments down from complex, sometimes heated exchanges to sets of premises, conclusions, moves, and counter-moves." It appears then, according to Gilbert's characterization of the Dialectical view, that argument is a process that centers on rational acceptance, and the exchange of reasons which are presented through the use of language.

1.1.2 The Rhetorical View

Those who endorse a rhetorical view of argument, hold that the main topic of interest is not the argument procedure, but rather what causes or drives them. The examination of the roots of an argument, positions a proponent of the rhetorical view in the face of arguers, rather than the logic of arguments. The attention placed on the actual arguers leads the Rhetorician to describe argument as an activity—a form of human communication. Human communication can generally be understood in broad terms. For the Dialectician, argument is purely a linguistic activity, and the words used convey messages which can be evaluated as reasons and conclusions. In addition to this, the Rhetorician allows that humans communicate through many additional means, such as facial expressions, eye contact, behaviour, etc. So, there is a conceptual shift from argument as the exchange of reasons to argument as communication. The emphasis placed on communication gives rise to an examination of the ways in which humans argue. Not only do we present our cases clearly and calmly, but we also at times scream.

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8 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 29.
9 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 30.
shout, and show any other array of emotion. This use of emotion plays a much more pivotal role for the Rhetorician than for the Dialectician.\textsuperscript{10} To understand why emotion is relevant to the Rhetorician's concept of argument, it will be helpful to introduce a distinction between argument as an artifact and argument as a human communicative process. The Dialecticians are often said to view an argument as an artifact. This means that argument is considered to be a tool—something that is used by humans, but at the same time can be detached from them. Just as an Archaeologist can examine a primitive hammer in isolation from the group of people that used it, so too can the Dialectician examine argument. It is not always necessary to attach an argument to an arguer. We can think back to our critical thinking textbooks for an example of this detachment. Excerpts of arguments were provided in many of these books, which were then labelled as fallacious, or sound with little more detail than the gender ambiguous names given to the imaginary arguers. There is a general lack of contextual information provided in such textbooks\textsuperscript{11}. However, if a Rhetorician were to write a critical thinking text book, an argument would occur within a normal human communication. That is to say that, one's reasoning would most likely be chaotic (as opposed to the linear nature of dialectical reasoning), and mixed in a jumble of other communicative devices, such as small talk and flattery. The reason that the dialectician extracts an argument from the rest of this human activity is because argument is seen as an artifact. Argument is a way of clearly

\textsuperscript{10} This is not to say that the dialectician ignores or denies the role of emotion in argument, but where the emphasis is placed on reasons, it is often the case that the emotion will be linked to a reason (a reason was presented emotionally), emotion is used irrelevantly in the argument, or emotion is used as a fallacious device.

\textsuperscript{11} Although context is not always essential to evaluate an argument, it does not mean that it is irrelevant. When testing an argument for validity, one only requires the presence of premises and conclusions. However, to test for soundness, one must look for potential fallacies which require one to examine situational and personal context. However, the dialectical form of argument is often criticized for completely dismissing context. See Nye (1990).
expressing reasons and positions. These reasons and positions can be extracted from the rest of communication, written clearly and in a linear fashion, and then examined on their merits. Conversely, Rhetoricians deny that an argument can be extracted from the rest of human communication—for this group of scholars, argument is a process not an artifact. For an illustration of this distinction, it may be helpful to think of two theories pertaining to the Philosophy of Mind. When trying to explain just what the human mind is, a group of theorists labelled as the Behaviourists, claimed that all apparent mental activity could be explained in physical terms. So, for example, my sensation of pain is nothing more than a physiological process. However, for another group of theorists, such as the Cartesians, the mind is a separate component in a human. Pain may be related to physiology, but there is more to the explanation. The mind is something that lacks physical definition and spatial proximity to the human body. This is analogous to the argumentation theorist in the following way: For the Dialecticians, there is something which can be extracted and examined in the unique human activity of argument. This object of examination portrays our human rationality—an argument is a chain of reasoning. However, for the Rhetorician, there is nothing that can be extracted and examined separately. There is no mysterious linkage of rational activity that deserves special status in isolation from the humans that expressed the argument; argument is just what takes place between people.

The two most prominent advocates of the rhetorical view are Charles Willard and Michael A. Gilbert. As mentioned above, Rhetoricians generally concern themselves with the cause or the root of an argument. One similarity between these two proponents is the emphasis they place on disagreement as the one necessary condition for argument.
Disagreement can be understood as a difference of opinion.\textsuperscript{12} Rhetoricians often exclaim that the main benefit of their view is that the notion of argument is expanded as to include a wider range of human activity.\textsuperscript{13}

1.1.3 The Ordinary View

The Ordinary view of argument aims to capture a conception of argument that is reflected in the use of the term by ordinary language users. There are three necessary conditions for a communicative encounter to be considered an argument according to this doctrine: 1) There is disagreement between communicating parties; 2) The disagreement does not characterize itself as a calm discussion; and 3) The encounter is emotional in nature.\textsuperscript{14} Whereas the term argument is an honorific label for the Dialecticians, in the ordinary usage, it can be quite a negative term. When we think of the way the word is applied in the everyday world, we can see that it is quite synonymous with other terms such as, quarrel, spat, squabble, and fight. Behaviours that are normally associated with the application of the term are quite often: shouting, crying, and aggressive movements such as fist pounding. Regardless of the reasoning that may be used by each of the disputing partners, it is generally the negative attitude about the encounter that is sufficient for the label of such as argument.

It is this negativity that places the definition offered by Jackson and Jacobs within the realm of the Ordinary view.\textsuperscript{15} According to the work of these theorists, arguments are

\textsuperscript{12} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argumentation} 30.
\textsuperscript{13} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argumentation} 29.
\textsuperscript{14} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argumentation} 31.
speech events that pertain to disagreement. The fact that an argument has occurred means that there has been a disruption in the intended course of a conversation.

1.2 The Four Modes

At this time, I would like to expand upon the work of Michael A. Gilbert. As mentioned above, Gilbert is considered to be a theorist working within the rhetorical tradition. Gilbert, mainly since 1997, has dedicated many of his publications to the topic of Informal Logic. More precisely, he advocates a normative theory of argumentation, which he labels Coalescent Argumentation. The foundation for this theory is based on what Gilbert describes as the description of actual argumentative encounters. Due to Gilbert's rhetorical ties, he is chiefly concerned with capturing and describing the argumentative practices that actually occur in the real world, whether these are encounters taking place calmly in a Philosophy classroom or emotional encounters taking place in a billiard hall. There is but one necessary and sufficient condition for the application of the term argument for Gilbert, namely, the presence of disagreement. Gilbert writes: “An argument is any disagreement—from the most polite discussion to the loudest brawl.”

Gilbert’s insistence on defining argument in a rhetorical sense can be in part contributed to his dissatisfaction with the traditional dialectical definition, treatment, and classification of argument. In the next section and in Chapter 2, Gilbert’s main concerns about the dialectical doctrine will be further explained, aiding in a fuller understanding of his theory of argumentation.

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16 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 40.
17 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 5.
1.2.1 The Critical-Logical Mode of Arguing

As its name suggests, the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation follows in the tradition of the philosopher's insistence on engaging in argumentation that is both logical, meaning that the argument abides by certain rules as dictated by the doctrines of formal and informal logic, but also that it is critical. This critical aspect is what drives the Ordinary view of argument to hold such negativity towards the activity. There is also an insistence that this mode can be conducted rationally, meaning that the process is reasoned, linear, and orderly.\textsuperscript{18} According to Gilbert, the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation is an argument "that takes its information, for example, warrant, backing, evidence, from traditional rationalistic sources, and which in addition is or can be put into traditional rationalistic form..."\textsuperscript{19}

However, in philosophy, argumentation is considered to be a tool for investigation. It is quite often the case that the area of study for a philosopher is not one that can be transferred into a laboratory for scientific physical analysis. Instead the philosopher must operate under the assumption that the true or correct conclusion will be the one that is able to be defended successfully against rival arguments. It is in this manner, the philosopher uses argumentation as a truth finding tool. Of course, it is rarely the case that rigorous argumentation yields a universally accepted and agreed upon conclusion, but it is the case that argumentation has been a process that has dismissed a wide variety of flawed arguments. So, although truth may not always be a product of the

\textsuperscript{18} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argumentation} 77.
\textsuperscript{19} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argumentation} 79.
process, the process does do well in diminishing the number of falsehoods that stand in
the way of the truth.

This, then, is where the critical aspect of argument plays its role. Critical
arguments must be launched against an opponent’s argument to ensure that it is not
flawed. The idea that this is in some way conductive to the acquisition to truth, may be
rooted in the ascription to what Gilbert refers to as the Natural Light Theory. This theory
not only requires that there be an identifiable distinction between the concepts of truth
and falsity, but also that theories that are true have a greater ability to overcome theories
that are false. False theories will succumb to criticism, and true theories will resist
criticism in some identifiable way—as if a natural light shines on the truth.

This mode of reasoning has traditionally been the dominant mode. As Gilbert
writes: “The [Critical-Logical] mode of reasoning is to thinking as the Oxford English
Dictionary is to language.”20 This comparison is meant to illustrate the authoritative
nature of this mode—it is the mode to be used in official places such as, government and
business reports, editorials and legal decisions, university seminars and colloquia.21

In addition to the official status of this mode, there is a dogma that human reason
is what separates man from the beasts. Such views have led this mode to exclude, or at
least diminish, the role of emotion and other alternative modes of human knowledge.
Emotion is seen as a basic human element that confuses or infringes on human reasoning
capabilities—thus, according to the canons of Informal Logic, we must limit the influence

20 Michael A. Gilbert, “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence,” Informal Logic XVI No. 2 (Spring
21 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 51.
our emotions have on our reasoning processes. In the event that emotion does appear in an argument, it is usually disregarded as something that is not essential to understanding and evaluating the argument (which is viewed as a reasoned complex) at hand. The following example will serve as a possible case of how emotion and other non-logical elements are dealt with in argument depiction:

Beth: I always screw up everything! I don’t know what is wrong with me—I hate myself. My volcano will never work without the vinegar! If I have no vinegar to react with the baking soda, how am I to induce explosion. I can’t believe I was so stupid as to spill it!

Sara: I think that maybe we can improvise with some other ingredients. There must be something in the school’s kitchen that would work. Oh look, there is red wine vinegar and baking soda, those will work!

Beth: No it will never work. I just deserve to fail!

Sara: Here watch.

Beth: Oh it does work—and this lava even looks reddish. Thanks Sara. You are a real friend.

Now, if I were to extract the argument from this encounter, it may resemble the following:

Beth: Vinegar and baking soda are necessary to make an artificial volcano explode. I lack one of these ingredients; therefore my volcano will not explode.

Sara: Red wine vinegar and baking soda will work. Both of these are accessible.

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22 Although it may be the case that traditionally emotion has been criticized for its role in argumentation, it is not necessarily the case that more current theorists of Informal Logic ascribe to this view. Informal Logicians acknowledge and accept that arguments are often driven by emotional factors and also that logical arguments may be focus on the topic of a person’s emotional state.
**Beth:** That will not work.

**Sara:** Yes it will. Observe this.

**Beth:** Yes, baking soda and red wine vinegar will work to cause an explosion.

Thus, what is left after extraction is a mere replica of the argument encounter. Reason, as much as possible is preserved, while other logically extraneous elements, such as Beth’s appreciation, anger, and self rage are omitted.

The following is another example of a Critical-Logical argument as it may occur in a realistic social setting. Amy and Anna are arguing about where to eat lunch. Amy wants to eat lunch in the school cafeteria, and Anna wants to go to Spring Garden Road to eat at the Moustache. Amy makes the following argument to Anna: “I think that we should eat at the cafeteria. We only have an hour before class, and the last few times we went to the Moustache, it took us over an hour to eat and get out of there. The cafeteria is right on campus so it should take us less than an hour to eat there. Also, the cafeteria is much cheaper. Since Christmas is right around the corner, we should conserve our money.” The conclusion of Amy’s argument is that she and Anna should eat lunch at the cafeteria.

This Critical-Logical argument has a clear conclusion. One does not need to examine the mental state of the arguer, or the context in which the argument occurred to discover the position of Amy. Also, the evidence used in the Critical-Logical mode is generally going to be reliable. This is attributed to the fact that the Critical-Logical mode has clear and obtainable rules and regulations on how to draw legitimate conclusions, what to count as good evidence, and what reasoning strategies are questionable (i.e.,
fallacies). Most Critical Thinking textbooks can act as a guide to producing probable conclusions.

1.2.2 The Emotional Mode

The suggestion that emotional content\(^{23}\) occurs within arguments is rarely contested. The issue, however, is rather what one should do with this so called 'emotional baggage'. The idea that the real argument must be extracted from this irrelevant or unimportant emotional content is founded on the traditional doctrine of Informal Logic. This doctrine informs us that an argument is an honorific label, thus, an argument is a label for a communication that ascribes to the notion that an argument is an artifact. This classification of an argument as an artifact suggests that arguments are the type of things that can be discovered, just as an archaeologist may discover a tool used by an ancient tribe. In a situation where an archaeological artifact is discovered, it may be the case that the artifact is described and investigated. This process may first take place in the field, that is, the investigation may incorporate the geography of the environment in which the artifact is found. However, the artifact is then removed and taken to the laboratory for further analysis. There, it may be described further in a detached scientific atmosphere. It will be catalogued according to its materials, supposed function, and approximate date of usage. It is this step, the extraction from the found environment, that is analogous to what the Argumentation Theorist may do with an argument. Within any given dialogue, there may be an argument that is awaiting discovery. In order to extract this argument, it is generally thought that it is necessary to remove or clarify any ambiguous material, such

\(^{23}\) Emotional content is to be understood broadly. Presenting an argument emotionally or using evidence derived from the emotions are to be considered arguments with 'emotional content'.
as, metaphors, unnecessary emotional content, conversational and rhetorical devices, etc.

After this process is complete, it is possible to rewrite an argument in a linear and logical fashion. For an example of this process, we can refer back to the example given in section 1.1.1.

Gilbert, however, believes that the attention placed on treating arguments as artifacts may hinder the study of Argumentation. In the process of extracting an argument from its natural social habitat, we strip away elements that are essential to the understanding of the argument and the complete communication. In light of this, Gilbert insists on the necessity of examining arguments within their social occurrences. Thus, elements that were once stripped away by Informal Logicians are placed at the same level of importance as logic when the understanding of a dialogue is emphasized. Due to this, Gilbert derives four modes of argumentation. The first is the classical mode—the logical mode. The three additional modes, may arguably be, modes that were denied access into the realm of argumentation due to their inclusion of elements that are traditionally believed to be rhetorical devices or irrelevant to argumentation. These three additional modes are labelled by Gilbert as: the visceral mode, the emotional mode, and the kisceral modes of argumentation.

The classification of an argument as emotional is generally due to the source of the reasons presented throughout the argument. The sources of such reasons are commonly classified as ‘non-logical’. For example, how one feels is the likely source of information, rather than rational sources such as the intellect. The presentation of this information need not be in the stereotypical emotional fashion (i.e.: crying and screaming), but may rather be presented calmly and in a logical format. An argument such as this may be presented in the following matter: “John, I am very unhappy with the
amount of alcohol you consumed at the Wilson's barbeque last night. It embarrasses me when you drink that much, so please don't do it again.” This is considered a logical format because there are clear premises (it embarrasses me when you drink a lot, and you drank a lot at the barbeque), and a clear conclusion (don't drink so much alcohol).

However, this does not preclude the instances where this is not the case, and the encounter is in fact carried out in a non-logical format with heightened emotional presentation. An argument of this type may occur such as: “John, I can't believe you! The way you acted! I am so pissed off that I can't even look at you. Don't even think of coming to the Wilson's with me next time, you drunken jerk!”

In each argument scenario, the person arguing with John is stating the way they feel about a situation. The fact that these feelings are used as reasons is what places these arguments into the emotional realm. “Emotional arguments demonstrate how we feel about certain claims or aspects of the argumentation procedure, and communicate emotional reactions through a variety of means to a dispute partner. In addition, emotions are sometimes used as warrants or data for claims.”

1.2.3 The Visceral Mode

Visceral arguments are classified as distinct due to their appeal to the physical. Physical in this sense has a broad application; it can refer to nonverbal behaviour such as body language or any other movement or use of the physical body or physical environment. For an example of a visceral argument, we can turn to Gilbert. He provides us with the following situation:

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24 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 84.
Ms. Burns looked up warily. “Where,” Mr. Burns railed, “is the damn newspaper?” Ms. Burns went over to the foyer hat stand where the paper lay as always.

“You seem very tense, dear. Did you have a bad day?”

Mr. Burns glared at her. “No,” he snarled, I did not have a bad day, and I am not tense.” Ms. Burns watched as he went and fell into his chair. She waited a minute, then came up behind him and began to gently rub his shoulders. At first he tried to flinch her off, but slowly Ms. Burns felt him give way as his muscles relaxed.

“Well,” Mr. Burns said after several minutes, “maybe I am a little tense.”

Perhaps before I go on to discuss how the encounter between Mr. and Ms. Burns can be classified as a visceral argument, I should first clear up any confusion as to how this encounter can be classified as an argument at all. Throughout this work, it is important to keep in mind that according to Gilbert, communication and disagreement are the only two necessary characteristics of an event in order for that event to be considered an argument. Whether these criteria should be considered sufficient will be a matter considered in latter sections of this work. So, under Gilbert’s theory, there is an argument expressed in the above scenario. The disagreement pertains to whether Mr. Burns had a bad day and is tense. The communication is both verbal and physical, and perhaps even emotional.

Thus, due to this physical component (i.e.: the rubbing of Mr. Burns’ shoulders) the argument can be labelled, at least in part, as visceral.

To assist in the illustration of the visceral mode of argumentation, it may be helpful to exemplify the Mr. Burns example as a logical, as opposed to visceral argument.

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25 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation, 85.
26 It is rarely ever the case that an argument will occur entirely within one mode. Gilbert’s four argument modes will commonly overlap, and one argument may make use of many different modes.
In the following example, I will rewrite the encounter as a logical argument.

Mr. Burns entered his house and slammed the door behind him. Ms. Burns looked up warily. “Where,” Mr. Burns railed, “is the damn newspaper?” Ms. Burns went over to the foyer hat stand where the paper lay as always.

“You seem very tense, dear. Did you have a bad day?”

Mr. Burns glared at her. “No,” he snarled, “I did not have a bad day, and I am not tense.” Ms. Burns watched as he went and fell into his chair. She waited a minute, then decided to confront the issue.

“Dear, I have been married to you for eighteen years. During that time, I become very skilled in reading your behaviour. Since you have walked in that door you have snarled at me, asked me questions you know the answer to, and fell into your chair. Now, this always means that you have had a bad day and are tense.”

Ms. Burns now knows the answer to her question, so she walks to the kitchen and says,

“Dinner will be ready in ten minutes, do you mind pouring the wine?”

In the logical example, Ms. Burns is merely concerned with whether Mr. Burns is tense. She examines the situation and arrives at her conclusion and feeling satisfied, she returns to preparing dinner. This behaviour may seem strange to any person who is, or has been, in a relationship. When in a situation where one’s partner is upset and unwilling to discuss it, there are usually measures taken other than a logical and rational confrontation to resolve the situation. Ordinarily, there are emotional and physical avenues pursued to get the upset partner to admit they are upset, and then discuss the situation. It is precisely these instances that Gilbert wishes to capture within his description of argumentative styles. The focus for Gilbert is not that people could, in theory, engage in only logical
arguments, but rather that in reality we do not. We have a range of communicative tools, each of which is employed in various situations. As skilled communicators, humans will generally use tools which will bring about a desired result or resolution. Hence, Ms. Burns employed a visceral technique of shoulder rubbing, as opposed to, arguably, a less productive technique of rational discourse.

1.2.4 The Kisceral Mode of Argumentation

The fourth and final mode of argumentation described by Gilbert is the kisceral mode. The word ‘kisceral’ is derived from the Japanese word ‘ki’ which refers to life-force or energy. Kisceral arguments are characterized by their use of, or appeal to: intuition, religious belief, mysticism, imaginative devices, and spirituality. On closer inspection of this argument type, the sheer popularity of this mode becomes evident. Kisceral arguments are those which appeal to elements not explained or proven by science. There is a connection between an arguer and information that is not justified in the usual scientific sense. For example, in most ordinary circumstances (i.e.; not in an epistemology class) I can say that I know that if I throw a baseball up into the air, it will return to the surface of the earth. I am justified in claiming to have this knowledge because there are laws of gravity, endorsed by the doctrine of science, that confirm the truth of my statement. This agreement between my belief and science are based on a phenomenon known as gravity. However, if I were to claim that I know that if I get on a certain plane that I will die in a plane crash, with no other evidence other than a hunch, this claim will not be considered justified. This, largely, is due to the fact that there is no scientific or acceptable explanation for the relationship between pure intuition and the occurrences of future events.
This apparent lack of acceptable scientific explanation can be said of all of the examples of kisceral arguments. By stating that there is an *apparent* lack of proper explanation, I mean to draw attention to the possibility that events such as the mystical and the intuitive may indeed unveil instances which are scientifically explainable. For example, I may claim that I do not want to rent a particular house because I had an eerie feeling when I was in it. However, this eerie feeling, unknown to me, is because the house very much resembles the haunted house from the *Amityville* horror movies, and that is why I found it creepy. However, this connection whether it exists or not, is unimportant when labelling kisceral arguments. What is important is the appeal to, or use of, information or beliefs that at the time are mysterious. The following is an example of a kisceral argument presented by Gilbert.27

Greg looked at Lisa expectantly. “Don’t you think we should raise the offer? He didn’t seem too pleased with it.”

Lisa shook her head, no. “Don’t change a thing,” she said, “be patient, I just know he’ll accept it.”

In the above example, Lisa offered an argument to Greg that had the conclusion that they should not raise the offer. The reason Lisa provided originated, we are left to assume, from a gut instinct, or a hunch of sorts.

### 3.0 Defending the Four Modes

Throughout an education in good reasoning strategies, students are taught how to best structure arguments, what sources are best to use for formulating reasons, how to

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27 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 87.
uncover fallacies, and so on. In other words, the doctrine of Informal Logic is taught as a normative guideline for improved reasoning. People adept in Critical-Logical reasoning may insist that the modes of emotional, visceral, and kisceral arguments are merely classifications of poor or unsound Critical-Logical arguments. Hence, what Gilbert has accomplished in his taxonomy of argument can be reduced to the original mode of argumentation—the Critical-Logical. In the following section, I will explore the ways in which it can be argued that the emotional, visceral, and kisceral modes of argument can be accounted for within the theory of Critical-Logical arguments.\(^{28}\)

3.1 Convincing versus Persuading

One of the issues that would have to be dealt with before claiming that the emotional, visceral, and kisceral argument forms are all varieties of the Critical-Logical form is the issue of the convince/persuade dichotomy. An objection of this sort would, in part, rely on the notion that the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation pertains to rules about argument form, namely that an argument at its basic roots must be comprised of at least one premise and a conclusion. The alternate modes of argumentation as offered by Gilbert contain these crucial elements. What they lack is the conformity to the rules of good or sound reasoning. For example, to reason well requires one to use good evidence on which to base a conclusion. Good evidence can be the result of using an appropriate source, it can pertain to relevancy, and whether the premises are being used to convince, rather than persuade an audience of the truth of a conclusion. The convince/persuade dichotomy has its roots in the work of Aristotle, and has within the history of

\(^{28}\) I will present the ways reasons and objections for reducing the modes into the Critical-Logical which were discussed by Gilbert throughout Coalescent Argumentation. Further elaboration will be provided in Chapter 2 of this work.
Argumentation Theory been a topic of much debate. However, regardless of whether there should be a distinction between convincing and persuading a person, the separation of the two terms does well to illustrate the distinction I wish to make. It can be said that the proponents of the Critical-Logical reasoning mode wish to ensure that reasoners are convinced, rather than persuaded by arguments. To be convinced implies that one has accepted a conclusion after consideration of the logical soundness and validity of an argument. On the other hand, to be persuaded means to accept a conclusion of an argument not because of its rational backing, but rather because of its emotional appeal or force. As Gilbert writes when summarizing this position: "'Persuading' appeals to the 'baser' components of the human psyche, namely the emotions, while 'convincing' speaks to the 'higher' aspects, namely, reason."^29

This distinction can be seen as a normative guide for those pondering whether to accept or reject a given conclusion—always ensure you are being convinced rather than persuaded when it comes to the matter of truth. This philosophical caution of emotion and evidence derived from appeal to emotion can be seen as a trigger for the wariness philosophers and Critical-Logical arguers feel towards arguments that embody the forms of visceral, emotional, and kisceral. There is a deep seated belief that arguments such as these are not as trustworthy, nor are they as rational as other arguments. We ought not to base our conclusions on how we feel, but rather on an evaluation of the situation.

On this issue, Gilbert denies that the separation of convince/persuade^30 is important in any relevant way. In instances where one chooses to accept a new belief into their systems, emotions will always play a role. For example, how connected it is to a

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^29 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 4.
^30 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 77.
faulty belief, will influence how tightly one holds onto it. The choice to accept a conclusion, whether it is one from a Critical-Logical or visceral argument, is going to be an emotional enterprise. So, since Gilbert denies this distinction, it seems acceptable to state that it is not a barrier when arguing for the reduction of the visceral, kisceral, and emotional argument forms to the Critical-Logical. If Gilbert is to maintain that these forms are distinct in some way to one another, he will have to provide an alternative reason.

In addition to overcoming the obstacle of the convince/persuade distinction, to reduce the four modes into just the Critical-Logical mode would require addressing the issue of linguistic explicability. As stated above, a Critical-Logical argument requires that all elements of the argument be linguistically explicit, or at least linguistically explicable. This condition requires that all elements of an argument be translatable into language. However, the emotional, kisceral, and visceral modes of argument incorporate behaviour, and other non-linguistic activities into the argument. In order to reduce all argument forms into one, it would require that this issue be dealt with. It seems to me that there are three options for dealing with the non-linguistic elements of an argument: 1) Claim that the non-linguistic information is not part of the argument—thus deny it has any relevance to the argument; 2) Translate the non-linguistic activity into language (a process that would require a verbal description of the events; or 3) Not allow access of arguments that employ non-linguistic elements into the realm of Critical-Logical, and classify them independently.

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31 Gilbert refers to 'translating' behaviour into language. I believe that a more accurate word would be 'describing', since 'translation' generally refers to the process of changing one language into another (i.e. translating French into English). Behaviour, however, isn't a language. We can describe what the behaviour is and its relevancy to a situation. When possible, I will make mention to describing, as opposed to translating, behaviour.
3.2 The Linguistically Inexplicable

Gilbert, however, does not believe that all four argument modalities can be boiled down, in one way or another, to the Critical-Logical form. Thus, according to Gilbert, it is the third option that should be exercised—arguments employing non-linguistic techniques should be given an independent classification from the Critical-Logical mode. To understand Gilbert's position on the issue of translation, it will be important to keep in mind the distinction between argument as an artifact and argument as human communication. Since Gilbert defines argument as a human communicative activity, argument is not something that can be captured, but rather something that can only be described by an observer. To grasp this point, we can think of a situation where we witness a mugging. Imagine that you are walking down Inglis Street and a young girl's purse is snatched by another girl. When the police arrive on scene, you are asked to describe what you witnessed. This description is the important detail—you are not asked to present or re-enact the incident. This is because the mugging is understood as a real life event—not something that can be rewound and played again for all to view. As a spectator, you can offer only particular aspects of the event—what the mugger looked like, where she ran to, and so on. You may write a statement and say "here is a description of the mugging", but never, "here is the mugging."32 You can only offer the police a representation of the event, not the original occurrence. Those who see argument as an artifact see it as something that can be presented time and time again in its original form. For such theorists, argument is a product—a completed work that can be extracted from a given context. For example, when a student reads an argument from a textbook,

32 Assuming, of course, that the event has not been captured on video tape.
they do not say that they are reading a description of an argument or a characterization of an argument, but rather that they are reading *the argument*.

Gilbert, however, sees an argument as a human communicative occurrence. Just as a detective may ask a witness about a crime, Gilbert may ask a witness about an argument. He would not expect a witness to be able to, in some magical way, capture the complexity of the human encounter, but rather would be quite satisfied with a description of what occurred. Unless the argument is captured in real time, the only thing that we can capture through a characterization is “a linguistic analogue or shadow of it.”

Thus, the translation of arguments from nonverbal to verbal does not capture the argument in the way a Critical-Logical endorser may think. In other words, capturing the behaviour that plays a major role in an argument presents a problem when reducing an argument to the Critical-Logical mode. This problem stems from our inability to adequately reduce such behaviour into linguistic descriptions. As soon as an argument is removed from the contextual occurrence, it becomes something else. A description of an argument is just that—a mere description.

However, we cannot simply omit the nonverbal information from the argument. According to Gilbert, nonverbal activity is not of secondary importance but rather that it is information that can either comprise an argument, or serve as an actual premise in an argument. As Gilbert writes, such non-discursive information “does not express a premise, it is a premise.” So, to omit this information would be to reject a premise in the argument.

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33 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 85.
This leaves us with the third option: to describe the non-linguistic activity as best we can, and classify arguments accordingly. Such description must appear in a double-bracket format—this will ensure that it is understood that it is not a linguistic analogue that is to serve as a premise, but the activity which is described. For an example of this double bracket procedure, we can turn to one offered by Gilbert in “Is It Argument”?55

Krista: Some women can overpower some men.
Mark: No they can’t.
Krista: [[Throws Mark]]

An action such as throwing a person cannot be made linguistically explicit36, though such actions may be described. The necessity of this double bracket is due to the fact that “actions […] are complex human interactions and cannot be reduced to something else.”37 To reduce such actions to mere descriptions is to support the notion that the description can serve as a premise, when in fact it is the action itself that fills this role. Thus, a description will not serve to actually capture the event. Gilbert adds that to assume that words can convey the message more clearly than an action is to commit the Logocentric fallacy.38

3.3 Scepticism About Linguistic Inexplicability

Verbal and written forms of communication undoubtedly combine to form a large proportion of the methods used for human communication. The reason that these forms

36 For example, “clunk, bang” does not do well in capturing the event.
38 This fallacy will be discussed in the following section.
of communication have been so widely praised and acknowledged may possibly be due to their ability to communicate messages to third party communicators. For example, by writing down a conversation that has taken place between me and a friend, I have the ability to share this communication with others. In a classroom setting, verbal and written forms, which I will also refer to as discursive forms of communication, are by far the most accepted and widely used methods. It would be a very strange situation for a professor to conduct a lecture through interpretative dance, rather than through discursive modes. It is perhaps due to this convention of communicating in discursive forms that has led to the idea that non-discursive forms are not nearly as capable of delivering a clear message. It is the assumption that verbal pronouncements take precedence over other forms and modes of communication that has led Gilbert to construct the Logocentric Fallacy.\textsuperscript{39} It is Gilbert’s contention that this is indeed a fallacy because relying on the belief that discursive elements of communication are the clearest, can often lead us to accept falsehoods rather than truth.\textsuperscript{40}

If we take a closer examination of the use of words, it should become clear that even a well written piece of work lacks the ability to communicate the central message clearly and completely. Many courses in university center around the task of clarifying written material—we need only take a Shakespeare or Kant class to realize that what appears in writing does not always communicate the message clearly. To grasp a message requires an understanding of the context, the significance, and the mode used to convey it. “Words, just because they are words, are not inherently clear. The messages they contain become clear to those who speak the language and are familiar with the


\textsuperscript{40} Gilbert, “Effing the Ineffable” 26.
For example, if I were to teach a lesson about mind-body dualism to a student who lacked all knowledge of the significance and historical relevance of this position, it may be claimed that until I offered this material, I could not teach the student to really understand the concept. For another example of the necessity of context to understanding, consider mentioning the Holocaust to an extra terrestrial visitor to Earth. Without an understanding of the significance of the consequences of this event to the Jewish peoples, and other minority groups, the Second World War, and human rights, it seems as if the full thrust of this message would be lost. As Gilbert writes, “there is no meaning without context, and the context is multi-sourced.” So, it seems then, that understanding a message is a rather complex activity.

Our reliance on the discursive elements of communication has blinded us to the vast array of non-discursive tools which are employed in sending and receiving messages. Throughout a conversation, for example, I may avoid making eye contact with my partner, or cross my arms. Such behaviours, when taken in the context of their occurrences, may alert my partner to my lack of interest in the topic of conversation. In order to communicate successfully, that is for each partner to understand the position offered, we must not only be able to interpret the verbal messages being sent, but also the nonverbal messages.

To re-cap then, when it comes to the topic of argumentation theory, discursiveness has historically been considered a necessary condition for something to either be an argument or a premise in an argument. This requirement is still prevalent in the Critical-

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41 Gilbert, “Effing the Ineffable” 28.
43 Gilbert writes: “Words, most especially when used in dialogic situations, do not give the entire message, but only part of it. The remainder, which may vary from a small percentage to practically the entire communication, is embedded in the context, tonality, history, and personalities of the arguers.” (Coalescent Argumentation, 38)
Logical model of argumentation. Gilbert launches an argument in defence of the linguistically implicit. His goal is not, however, to advocate the acceptance of non-discursive elements into the Critical-Logical mode, but rather to further identify the three modes of argumentation that rely on non-discursive elements within the realm of argumentation, even without their reliance on linguistic elements.

Gilbert speculates that criticism of the linguistically inexplicable may center on concerns relating to translation. Advocates of the discursive may feel that problems in an accurate translation of the behaviour may result, thus diminishing the clarity of arguments. To this point, Gilbert notes that it is rarely the case that even in the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation that all elements that occur within an argument are linguistically explicit. Take the following argument:

Sarah: I really wish that you would reconsider going to the function with me tonight, John.

John: People at those types of events are completely phoney and pretentious.

Sarah: But...Well...We’re married, and it just isn’t right for you not to attend with me.

In this argument, there are many messages that are not clearly conveyed through words—they are implicit in what is actually being said. I will re-write the argument including some of the possible implicit premises. The implicit premises will appear in square brackets.

Sarah: I really wish that you would reconsider going to the function with me tonight, John.

[You should do what I desire for you to do.]

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44 As previously noted, it is not necessarily the case that the argument must all occur within language, but rather that what does not occur within language must be linguistically describable to become a premise.
**John:** People at those types of events are completely phoney and pretentious.

[I do not want to be around people who are phoney and pretentious.]

[I do not want to go to the function.]

**Sarah:** But... Well... We’re married, and it just isn’t right for you not to attend with me.

[People who are married attend functions together.]

[By not attending the function together, we would be doing something against convention.]

[We should not do things against convention]

[We should attend the function together.]

The idea that there are implicit premises in arguments is accepted within the Critical-Logical doctrine. They are acknowledged and dealt with. Even in mathematics and formal logic, obvious proofs are often not recorded, but are rather left for the reader to deduce. It is rare that arguers ever accomplish a precise translation of the messages in an argument, yet communication occurs successfully. Discursiveness then is an unrealistic expectation for arguments, and thus, the alternate modes should not be criticized for incorporating non-linguistic elements.

It may be said, however, that regardless of the use of implicit messages by all four argument types, the sort of messages advocated by Gilbert for inclusion into the argumentative realm are far less clear and more controversial than the sort ordinarily encountered in the Critical-Logical mode. Let us take the following example: Tanya, Amy’s sister, has just come home from a long day of teaching at a local high school. Amy is excited to see her because Tanya has promised that when she got home from
school, she would help Amy decorate for Christmas. Amy begins to get garland and ribbon out of the attic. While Amy is climbing up and down the attic stairs, Tanya sits, slumped in a chair. Tanya has not even removed her jacket or boots. When Amy asks Tanya if she feels up to decorating, Tanya responds in a tired voice, “sure”. Next, Amy says, “Hey, why don’t we leave this until later? Maybe tonight we could rent a movie and just relax?”

If just the linguistic aspect of this encounter were taken into consideration, we would have the following dialogue:

\[ \text{Amy: Tanya, do you feel up to decorating?} \]
\[ \text{Tanya: Sure.} \]
\[ \text{Amy: Hey, why don’t we leave this until later? Maybe tonight we could rent a movie and just relax?} \]

The message that the reader derives from this dialogue is vastly different than the message from the prior example. In the previous example, Amy realized that Tanya did not want to decorate for Christmas at the present time. Tanya did not convey this information through a logical argument, but rather through body language (poor posture) and physical behaviour (not removing shoes and jacket, and talking in a tired voice). Amy is able to realize the conclusion of Tanya’s argument by appealing to her previous knowledge of body language and its relation to particular mental states. However, without appeal to these visceral aspects, and just reliance on the recognition of the linguistic messages, accurate communication does not take place between the partners.

So, just as it may be the case that at times, non-linguistic behaviour is difficult to translate, it is also the case that at times the linguistic is difficult to translate without making reference to other aspects of the dialogue. When decoding a situation, we need to
look at the context with the widest lenses available. Thus, it would impede, rather than improve argumentation if non-discursive elements were banned or dismissed from the proceedings.

It may be natural at this point to wonder what has just been accomplished in the above section. Firstly, it was claimed that the visceral, kisceral, and emotional modes of argument were unique, and could not be explained by appeal to the methodology of the Critical-Logical mode. This was largely due to the alternate modes’ reliance on non-discursive elements. However, I then went on to write about how the Critical-Logical mode relies on non-discursive elements as well. So, how then, does this aid in isolating the modes from one another? The answer to this question can be found by observing the doctrines of the various modes. This examination will yield a major difference not only with what an argumentation theorist is to do about non-discursive elements, but also about the status of such premises.

The Critical-Logical mode allows that there may be enthymemes within arguments. These enthymemes can be put into propositions, thus, becoming part of an argument. So long as all elements of an argument are linguistically explicable, there is no issue for the critical theorist. However, the other three modes of argument often rely on warrants that are not expressed in language, and unlike the enthymematic material in the Critical-Logical mode, cannot be formed into propositions. Gilbert provides us with the following example.45

John and Mary are having an argument about their vacation plans. Mary is frustrated by John’s repeatedly saying of her suggestions, “We can’t afford that.” Finally, with some heat, she says, “It doesn’t sound like we can afford anything.” John’s face clouds over; he looks sad and embarrassed. He

45 Gilbert, Coalescent Argument 80.
turns away forlornly, head hanging down.

Gilbert contends that John is offering an emotional argument, "and that to merely reduce it to linguistic terms is to negate both the method and purpose (conscious or not) of the move." The complex nature of John's message cannot be captured into a direct translation—in order to do justice to a proper translation of this behaviour; we would need to pay particular attention to the context of the argument, which would involve an understanding of the positions and personalities of the two arguers. The following is another example provided by Gilbert:

Carole and Tony have been involved in a shaky relationship for some time. Carole believes that Tony does not really care about the relationship, and does not accept his protestations to the contrary. She informs him one evening that she does not want to see him anymore. When he sees that she is serious, he turns away from her. She turns him back and sees tears in his eyes. "Oh my goodness," Carole says, "you really do care."

Since the behaviour of Tony is a premise in this argument, we can do as outlined in the above section and describe it within the double-bracket system. However, unlike the Critical-Logical method of phrasing implicit premises, we are only describing the activity within the argument, not the reason or premise this activity represents. As Gilbert writes, "Tony's tearing, can be noted and described, but not propositionalized because it was the actual occurrence, not a description of it or reference to it, that composed the datum that convinced Carole." Translation, then, is something which occurs within Critical-Logical arguments, but not emotional, visceral, or visceral arguments. These issues of translation, linguistic

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46 Gilbert, Coalescent Argument 80.
47 Gilbert, Coalescent Argument 96.
48 Gilbert, Coalescent Argument 96.[my italics]
necessity, artifact status, and derivation of premises are enough to encourage Gilbert to draw distinctions between the Critical-Logical mode and the three alternative modes.

Attempts, then, to boil the four modes into the original Critical-Logical mode fail, and we are left with an understanding that human communication is a complex and multifaceted activity.

4.0 Coalescent Argumentation

In addition to a descriptive account of argumentative modes, Gilbert offers a normative theory of argumentation. This normative theory is supported by the foundation laid in Gilbert's quest to examine the nature and uses of argumentation. In other words, the theory is based upon the definitions, explorations, and criticisms explicated by Gilbert throughout his descriptive works. Coalescent argumentation "involves the joining together of two disparate claims through recognition and exploration of opposing positions." Words such as "joining together" and "recognition and exploration" may send out a signal to the reader that this form of argumentation differs from that which is generally studied in Critical Thinking classes. Generally, words used to discuss argumentation include, and are definitely not limited to, the following: defeating, winning, criticizing, attacking, etc. The first clue, then, in understanding this coalescent approach may come from the language used to describe it. Words that seem to illustrate war are quite popular in the Critical-Logical approach to argument, and this may be a result of a philosophy that argumentation is the war against falsehoods. Truth, it is thought, will prevail over the use of trickery, fallacies, and incompleteness of a false or untrue position. It is often thought that argument is a process that aids in generating true

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49 Gilbert, Coalescent Argument 106.
premises: foundations for knowledge. So, in light of this ‘all or nothing battle’ of truth over falseness, it can seem strange to reference a joining or a merging of positions when discussing argument. Gilbert, however, is quite sceptical that argumentation is a process that has the primary goal of determining the truth of a claim.\textsuperscript{50} Such an argument would be a pure inquiry; the process would be free of human contaminants such as, personal investment in the conclusion, ego, manipulation, deception, and so on. The only goal for the encounter would be to generate a conclusion which was true. Gilbert does not deny that this type of argument could exist, but rather that if it ever really occurs, it is such a rarity that we ought not to focus on it as an actual and realistic model of argumentation.\textsuperscript{51}

In addition to the use of language that supports joining and agreement, rather than attacking and defeat, Gilbert describes his coalescent approach in terms of exploration and recognition. To ‘recognize’ requires that a dispute partner be aware of the claim that their partner is making, and to ‘explore’ requires that they come to a solid understanding of that claim. This element of the theory is based on Gilbert’s claim that disputes originate or fail to dissipate due to miscommunication or a lack of understanding between the dispute partners. Hence, an exploration of a claim will not only ensure that each partner understands the nature of the argument, but also discovers whether there is a dispute between the partners at all.

To summarize then, Gilbert offers us a normative theory of argumentation—thus, after an examination of the ways in which we do argue, he offers us a recommendation for change. This theory is based on the notion that there are four distinct modes of

\textsuperscript{50} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argument} 70.

\textsuperscript{51} Gilbert’s theory of Coalescent Argumentation does not impede on the process of pure inquiry. If two people both hold the goal of engaging in a pure inquiry, then Gilbert’s model of Coalescent Argumentation may aid the dispute partner’s understanding of the positions being defended.
argumentation and that the Critical-Logical mode should not be considered the primary or superior mode. In addition, Gilbert’s formulation of his theory rests on conceptions of agreement and understanding. “Furthermore, coalescent argumentation views an argument not as an isolated and autonomous artifact, but as a linguistic representative for a position-cluster of attitudes, beliefs, feeling, and intuitions. In this regard, coalescent argumentation is an attitude correlated to a practice.”

The method of arguing in a coalescent manner can be explained in terms of five main steps:

**Step 1: Proponent should know his/her position prior to stating agreement or disagreement.**

When speaking about argumentation, we generally make reference to the claim that is being asserted. However, Gilbert describes such claims as mere linguistic labels that serve to represent an arguer's position. A position is a matrix of beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions that are connected to a claim. An arguer may or may not be aware of the vast array of information that is used to make up a claim. In fact, it is likely that there will be what Gilbert terms 'dark-side' items in a position or in an argument. “Dark-side commitments include both positional components known to the arguer and not revealed (for either strategic or practical reasons,) as well as components unknown to the arguer as concomitants of the avowed position.” An example of a dark-side commitment could be found in an argument where a young girl defends a position primarily because the majority of her beloved family agrees with it. Another dark-side commitment could arise from the aversion two disputants feel for one another. In any case, when exploring one’s

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53 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argument* 49. [italics original]
54 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 105-106.
own personal position, it is helpful to not only explore the obvious beliefs, attitudes, values, and emotions connected to the claim, but also the more subtle and perhaps discrete connections.

After one is comfortable with their understanding of the position, they should explore their personal goals for the encounter. Gilbert sees argument as a goal orientated process. He provides us with the following goal types: strategic goals, face goals, and task goals. “The underlying conception is that communicative interactions in general and arguments in particular are operating on more than one level, and that there is always a balance between achieving one’s immediate objective and maintaining a certain kind of relationship between oneself and one’s opposer.”

Relevant to this stage of argumentation are what Gilbert labels apparent strategic goals (ASG). The strategic goals capture what the arguer hopes to immediately accomplish through the argumentative procedure. This goal may change throughout the course of an argument. Take the following example:

_Sally:_ Jim, could you please go and shovel the driveway. If you do not remove the snow soon, it will accumulate to the point where you can no longer lift it.

_Jim:_ Look Sally, I told you three times that I will shovel the driveway as soon as the hockey game is over. I am really getting angry that you keep nagging me. You don’t see me telling you when you have to do your chores, and I expect the same from you.

_Sally:_ Gee Jim; I am so sorry; I didn’t realize that I was being such a nag. How much time is left in the game?

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In the above example, Sally's strategic goal was to get Jim to shovel the driveway. However, after his hostile response, this strategic goal changed to a goal that reflected her desire to preserve peace between them (a face goal). Thus, it is important, before an argument commences, to understand as fully as possible our hopes and expectations for the encounter. Along with this exploration, we should also consider two other goal types: face goals and primary strategic goals (as opposed to apparent strategic goals). Face goals are the sorts which pertain to our goals about the relationship to our dispute partner. For example, I may have the face goal to preserve a friendly relationship, or I may want to anger my opponent enough that he or she walks away for the encounter. Primary strategic goals differ from apparent strategic goals in the sense that they will not be abandoned throughout the course of an argument. For example, in the scenario with Sally and Jim, Sally abandoned her apparent strategic goal for another goal. However, primary strategic goals are of the utmost importance, and are held steadfastly in the face of opposition. An example of a primary strategic goal could be to commence an argument without having emotional outbursts (i.e. shouting or crying).

The classification of goals into categories is not a rigid procedure. There are times when a face goal can be a task goal, and vice versa. When we attempt to identify our goals, we should do so as honestly and accurately as possible. The better able we are to undertake this process, the more we enhance our chances of having a successful coalescent encounter, thus magnifying our chances to leave the argument feeling satisfied.
Step 2: Discover Con's Position

Before disagreement is pronounced by the dispute partners, the proponent should explore the position of their dispute partner (labelled “Con”). Again, this requires an exploration, not only of the clarification of the claim, but also the nexus of personal and professional connections to this claim. At this point you, the proponent, can openly disagree with the claim being set forth by the dispute partner. After this dispute has been established, a search for a resolution can commence. The first step toward this resolution is to examine Con’s apparent strategic goals and face goals.

Step 3: Identify Commonality

It is at this point in the argument that the dispute partners can explore areas within their arguments that bear similarity. Such similarity may be found through a comparison of strategic goals and face goals. This can bring about a coalescent conclusion by reaching an agreement which satisfies mutual goals, thus, the end result is a position that reflects the needs and desires of both dispute partners. However, it is possible that the dispute partners lack any commonality in their task and strategic goals, hence, the exploration will not yield any possible opportunities for agreement. In this case, the dispute partners must turn to alternate avenues for agreement.

Step 4: Examine the Modes

The first question that a dispute partner can ponder is whether they and their partner are both arguing in the same mode, and whether the central disagreement is about mode utilization. Take the following example:
Jake: Oh Susan, I have had such a horrible day. Do you remember that project I was supposed to have into my boss today? Well, I left it to the last minute, and I got a reprimand for handing in work that was below acceptable expectation. I am so upset that I just can’t take the kids to soccer practice. Can you please take them?

Susan: Before we discuss the soccer practice issue, let us focus our attention to the dilemma at work. Is the following a correct synopsis: you were given a deadline, probably one of acceptable duration, you were aware of this deadline and the consequences for missing it, you ignored the pressing nature of this deadline, you panicked last minute to hand in your work, it was poor as a result of this, and now you were reprimanded?

Jake: Yes, that’s what happened.

Susan: Well, it sounds as if you got exactly what you deserved. So what is the issue?

Jake: Oh never mind. Forget I mentioned it.

In the above example, Jake was attempting to have an emotional argument with Susan. Susan, however, did not respond in the same mode Jake was utilizing. Jake’s goal, we can presume, of seeking comfort from Susan was not achieved. Susan did not respond in an emotional mode, but rather a logical. Susan examined the issue, decided that Jake got what he deserved and moved on. An example such as this can help illustrate that when two partners argue in distinct modes, confusion and disappointment can arise.

Under Gilbert’s recommendation, Jake should let Susan know that what he really needs is comfort, rather than an affirmation that his punishment was just. This testament may trigger Susan to realize that she has misunderstood the communication. At this point
the two partners can attempt to communicate in the emotional mode. A switch to this mode could change the encounter in the following way:

**Jake:** Oh Susan, I have had such a horrible day. Do you remember that project I was supposed to have into my boss today? Well, I left it to the last minute, and I got a reprimand for handing in work that was below acceptable expectation. I am so upset that I just can't take the kids to soccer practice. Can you please take them?

**Susan:** Before we discuss the soccer practice issue, let us focus our attention to the dilemma at work. Is the following a correct synopsis: you were given a deadline, probably one of acceptable duration, you were aware of this deadline and the consequences for missing it, you ignored the pressing nature of this deadline, you panicked last minute to hand in your work, it was poor as a result of this, and now you were reprimanded?

**Jake:** Yes, that's what happened.

**Susan:** Well, it sounds as if you got exactly what you deserved. So what is the issue?

**Jake:** The issue is not what happened, per se, but rather how I feel about what happened. I just feel really bad about myself, and I was hoping you could help me feel better.

**Susan:** Oh, Jake, I am so sorry. I understand how it must feel to disappoint your boss—I know how much you love your job. Are you having problems at work—I mean it is not like you to be irresponsible. Maybe we should go to bed early tonight, and we can look for a reason that this happened. Let me give you a hug—everything is going to be okay.

Now that Jake and Susan communicated in the same mode, it was easier to realize the goals of each dispute partner. However, some disagreements will not dissolve so easily.
If an examination of goals and modes does not assist in partners arriving at a coalescent conclusion, there is one last avenue for success.

**Step 5: Explore the Depth**

If agreement and consensus cannot be reached through an examination of modes and surface level goals (such as face and strategic goals), the dispute partners can begin a quest for uncovering more deep-seated elements of the dispute. The first step in this process would be to evaluate one’s own goal set. This may uncover secondary goals that may be shared with an opponent (such as that two business disputants are both trying to land a contract to financially aid their families). If this approach does not offer any benefit to coalescence, the dispute partners can inspect their personal values, emotions and motives. A motive is a more general goal; “they delimit...the sort of goals that determine task and face goals in a broad general way.”

4.1 Scepticism about Coalescence

Considering that arguments often involve a conflict between arguers’ desires, philosophies, goals, and beliefs, it is understandable that this theory may be met with scepticism about the extent that two dispute partners can ‘coalesce’ the argument away.

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56 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 68.
57 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 49.
The aim of this form of argumentation is to find agreement on as many levels as possible. Depending on the particular argument, finding as many points of agreement may be a measure of success, whereas, in other arguments if there can be consensus on just one major point the goal of the process has been achieved. There is, however, no guarantee that the coalescent approach to argumentation will result in success: people can get impatient, self-interested, or a variety of other human conditions that may impede the process.\(^{58}\) Coalescent argumentation "is an avowedly normative undertaking, and therefore, relies for its utilization on the goodwill of the participants, as well as their belief that proceeding in a coalescent fashion does, ultimately, achieve greater and more enduring results."\(^{59}\) The coalescent approach to argument is an ideal—coalescence, then should be judged as a matter of degree,\(^{60}\) and is a process that relies upon the empathetic capabilities of the dispute partners. To coalesce, we must empathize with our dispute partners.\(^{61}\) Thus, we must desire to comprehend, understand and resolve the roots of human dispute if the coalescent approach is to provide benefit to arguers.

### 4.2 Morality and Coalescent Argumentation

It may be true that a coalescent approach to argumentation may be a wise choice if one wishes to engage in argumentation where agreement and understanding are the overarching goals. At this point in Gilbert’s theory, whether or not this theory is adopted and used is a free choice for arguers to make. However, in “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence,” Gilbert ups the ante on his theory—he presents an argument that there

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58 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 119.
59 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 122.
60 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 111.
61 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 111.
may be a moral onus on the part of argumentation theorists and Critical Thinking teachers to see that the coalescent approach to argumentation is incorporated into mainstream teaching, research and consideration.  

Gilbert bases his view on the work of several Feminist theorists: Carol Gilligan, Deborah Tannen, Karen Warren, and Andrea Nye. While these theorists differ substantially in their philosophies of gender and communication, these differences need not affect Gilbert’s incorporation of their views into his theory of coalescence. This is because Gilbert’s use of their work does not depend in any way on the essentialist nature of their writings. “This is because the concern here is with communicative practices, and most authors seem willing to accept that for whatever reasons there are identifiable gender differences in modes of communicating that are generalizable.”

Women, argues Gilligan, rely on a sense of connectedness when relating to the world. This means that women focus on their relationships with others when interacting with this world—and these connections play an important role in the decisions made by women and the way in which they engage with others. There is a level of concern and empathy that accompanies this sense of connection—thus, women will concern themselves with the circumstances of others. Paying heed to circumstances may mean that one is concerned with an individual’s motivations, feelings, and consideration for consequences.

This sense of connection does well to complement Tannen’s theory that women situate themselves within a web of connection—thus they are interconnected to others in complex and significant ways. These notions of female connectedness contrast with the

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62 Gilbert, “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence” 99.
63 Gilbert, “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence” 99. [italics original]
male methods of socialized behaviour and identity. While the female concerns herself with the feelings of others, the male feels competitive and aggressive towards his peers.\(^{64}\) The male will place himself and others into categories of winners and losers. Failure and dependence are fears of the male—he evaluates life as a hierarchy, and he is constantly fighting to be at the top of this ladder.

In light of these observations about the genders, it is no wonder that theorists have noticed substantial differences in communicative practices. The male mode of communication has value for those practices endorsed by the Critical-Logical mode of reasoning. Men will attempt to argue in a detached manner; they will pay attention to chains of reasoning rather than to the personal attributes of their dispute partner. Arguments are deemed to be a rule orientated activity where there will be a battle of wits that will end with an obvious winner and loser.

Women, on the other hand, do not wish to engage in directly confrontational activities. They will often consider the feelings of their dispute partner as the most imperative aspect of an argument. A female's concern with particular circumstances often motivates her to explore an issue as broadly as possible, as opposed to the male who wishes to remain detached from a situation. Due to this, women will attempt to enter into communications which are "negotiations for closeness in which people try to seek and give confirmation and support to reach consensus."\(^{65}\)

These observations when compared to Karen Warren's exploration of the Critical-Logical mode of reasoning prove to be quite disconcerting. Warren describes the Critical-Logical mode of reasoning as a system that values hierarchy, endorses emotional


and psychological separation, and proposes domination of one arguer over another.
When described in this way, the Critical-Logical mode seems to complement the male arguer and greatly impedes the needs of the female. The Critical-Logical mode is not only the dominant mode for philosophical reasoning, notes Gilbert, but also the dominant mode for communication in general. To cite examples of how alternative modes of communication, or perhaps the female mode of communication, are expelled from the official realms of society, Gilbert cites the fact that emotional reactions are excluded from the board room and trials are halted when somebody begins to cry. There is a persistence to examine the facts and exclude the feelings of others in proceedings such as investigations. Now, there is nothing wrong, in essence, with a mode of reasoning being declared dominant, the problem arises when a subordinate mode, such as the emotional mode, is banned from a forum where power and authority dwell. In other words, the dominant mode of reasoning is not one that represents the society at large. Rather, it is used to further the boundary between the male and female, where the male’s place of privilege is secured, and the female is secluded in silence. As Gilbert writes: “If Warren is correct, or even partially correct, then the C-L tradition has within it certain assumptions and perquisites which are inimically intolerant of the reasoning and communicative modes of a large portion of the population.”

The coalescent model of argumentation, argues Gilbert, does well to incorporate the needs and abilities of most arguers. The model emphasizes the female’s desire to

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66 Gilbert, “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence” 97-98.
67 At least in the Western World, the Critical-Logical mode seems to be dominant.
68 Gilbert, “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence” 98.
69 To this Gilbert adds that even if it is the case that any women are comfortable communicating within the Critical-Logical mode, there are still a significant portion of the population that are disadvantaged by this mode. This disadvantaged portion includes a significant minority of males who share the female perspective. See endnote 7 Gilbert, “Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence” 113.
connect with a dispute partner through understanding and empathy. Also, the desires to negotiate and agree are complemented as these are the overarching goals of the process. The adversarial nature of 'critical' argument is expelled, and replaced by a more friendly and cooperative notion of union. Since the coalescent approach values the meeting of needs of each dispute partner, if two male partners wish to dispute through reference to facts and rules of logic, they may do so. What is required is not an abandonment of the Critical-Logical system of argument, but rather an expansion of the term to incorporate the female modes.

Since the Critical-Logical mode of argument seems to be oppressing to females, there is a moral obligation on our part to see that this situation is rectified. This does not mean that males should be disadvantaged by eschewing the Critical-Logical mode, but rather that we should aim to compromise between extremes. The coalescent method could serve as this middle ground, bringing a renewed philosophy of communication to the field of argumentation theory.
Chapter 2
Criticisms of the Coalescent Theory

Within the current literature, criticisms have been aimed at various elements of Gilbert’s argumentation and coalescence theory. In this chapter, I will explore the major criticisms, and in addition present some of my personal objections to the coalescent approach to argument. Since Gilbert’s theory is essentially two-tiered, some of these criticisms will be relevant to the theory’s foundational aspects, such as Gilbert’s definition of argument, description of argument, classification of the four modes, and his critique of the Critical-Logical mode. In addition to an exploration of Gilbert’s foundational elements, some criticisms are directed toward the normative coalescent theory itself.

2.1.1 Gilbert Mischaracterizes the Critical-Logical Mode

Gilbert’s motivation to construct an alternate description of argument, to that of the Critical-Logical mode, may in a large part be due to his dissatisfaction with this mode’s portrayal of argument. However, it has been argued by Sharon Bailin and Barbara Warnick that Gilbert either misunderstands the capabilities of or misconstrues the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation. Thus, Gilbert’s alternate description of argument and the accompanying coalescent theory is unnecessary, as an accurate portrayal of the Critical-Logical mode yields the required resources to adequately deal with argument.

One of Gilbert’s criticisms of the Critical-Logical mode is that it deals with argument a-contextually. Gilbert finds support for this claim in Andrea Nye’s distinction
between reading and analyzing. According to Nye, users of the Critical-Logical mode analyze arguments. This means that they examine an argument for its validity, soundness, and truth of premises. We do this process of judging an argument out of the context in which the argument occurred. According to Nye, Critical-Logical users base their judgment of an argument on isolated information. This can be negative because context (the very thing that Critical-Logical users supposedly ignore) can offer much needed information about a particular argument. For example, part of the context of an argument includes information related to the person who is making the argument and goals this person aims at satisfying. For an example of ‘reading’ an argument, consider if representatives of the United States advanced an argument that the countries of the world should pool together their water resources, we should be very cautious of such an argument. We should be cautious because the United States has fewer water resources than some other countries in the world. Therefore they would have a vested interest in the conclusion they presented.

The caution that I just expressed in accepting the above conclusion is due to the fact that I read, rather than analyzed the argument. To ‘read’ an argument entails that one examine the argument in the context in which it occurred. The goal of this process is not necessarily to judge the argument, but to understand it. In reading, we will aim to understand the importance of a conclusion, who was making the argument, why they were making it, and thus make relevant the many goals an arguer brings to the table. We will try to piece together the story. This story can aid us in acquiring a more complete understanding of the argument, rather than just an investigation of the mere logical structure, which is what analyzing an argument accomplishes.

I am discontented with Nye's claim that Critical-Logical users analyze argument behind some veil of contextual ignorance. I will explore the method used by Critical-Logical argument users and see if Nye and Gilbert correctly conclude that the Critical-Logical mode of argument endorses ignorance to the situated nature of argument. One way to determine this is to examine the rules and regulations of Critical-Logical argument found in formal and informal logic texts. If you open a logic or Critical Thinking text book, you will notice that most have sections dedicated to fallacies. From an examination of the information in these books, I can answer the question; do Critical-Logical users pay heed to an argument's context?

The first fallacy that I would like to discuss is *argumentum ad verecundiam* (appeal to authority). There are times when an appeal to authority is a legitimate act in argument, and times when it is not. We allow an appeal to authority if the authority in question is offering evidence that most experts in the field agree with, and if the person making the argument could not access this information themselves. So Critical-Logical users are instructed to investigate the context in which an appeal to authority was used to decide whether or not it was fallacious.

Another standard fallacy is *argumentum ad hominem* (ad hominem). This fallacy occurs when an arguer draws attention to (perhaps by attacking) the person who made the argument. Arguers are instructed to draw attention to the merits of the argument, and ignore who is making it. However, like the appeal to authority fallacy, this is not carved in stone. There are times when a Critical-Logical user is instructed to do an ad hominem appeal. For example, if a person with a history of mental illness made an argument that her dog was stolen, I would be cautious whether or not to believe her. I may do a little investigation. Has she made claims like this before? How mentally ill is she? Did she
even have a dog? If the answers to these questions confirmed that this person was not very credible, then I would not be committing the ad hominem fallacy if I rejected her argument based on the source. So, again in analyzing an argument, Critical-Logical users must rely on ‘reading’ skills. Critical-Logical users need to evaluate context. The person giving the argument, and the story behind that argument, must be considered.

Barbara Warnick would also endorse the view that the Critical-Logical mode of argumentation, as much as possible, seeks to not only criticize arguments, but to understand them. “Those more sympathetic to the informal logic project might point out that is seeks to understand (through diagramming and modeling) how arguments are structured and how they function rather then to exclusively criticize them.”

Gilbert may, however, include the feelings of a dispute partner among the crucial contextual features that the Critical-Logical mode of argument ignores. I agree with Gilbert that the critical enterprise itself is often insensitive to the needs and emotional dispositions of the people with whom we argue. I agree with Bailin when she writes: “...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.” Being sensitive does not infringe on the enterprise of critical inquiry and evaluation, and I see no reason why the

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72 Warnick, Book review 429.
Critical-Logical mode would object to its implementation into a normative guide to reasoning.  

Gilbert could respond to this suggestion by claiming that even if arguers engage in argumentation in such a way as to be sensitive to the emotional and psychological needs of their dispute partner, the goals of the Critical-Logical mode of argument are still essentially negative, as it aims to result in one partner conquering and defeating another. To this characterization of the goals of critical argumentation, Bailin responds by claiming that the “aim of C-L is not to defeat the opposing argument but rather to concede to the strongest... C-L aims at finding the best justified position.” Determining what position is best justified 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.” Thus, the Critical-Logical mode endorses a reconciliation of views similar to the normative framework for coalescent argumentation.

Perhaps in discussing the decontextualized nature of the Critical-Logical approach to argument, Gilbert is expressing concern over the distinction between argument as an artifact and argument as a communicative process. It is true of the Critical-Logical model that it does endorse the possibility of separating ‘the argument’ from the arguer—an extraction Gilbert denies is possible. A view that ascribes to the situated nature of

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74 I will address this issue in section 2.5.
75 Bailin, “Truth and Reconciliation” 7.
76 Bailin, “Truth and Reconciliation” 7.
77 The purpose of reconciliation for coalescent argumentation differs that that of the Critical-Logical mode—for the prior reconciliation is to promote agreement, while the later attempts to seek truth. This issue will be discussed in Section 2.3.
argument would advocate that arguments occur between people as opposed to occurring between theories. However, it does not seem that even Gilbert himself accepts such a rigid dichotomy between artifact and process. Arguments can be extracted from their context in the sense that we can refer to and make comment on them in separation from their original occurrence. Evidence that this occurs can be found by observing the way in which we “talk about arguments outside the context of particular arguers, for example, the deterrence argument for capital punishment, various scientific arguments, or even the arguments for C-L which Gilbert criticises (he does not refer to the arguments of particular individuals, rather he argues against a position).” So, even though arguments are extracted from real life interactions by Critical-Logical users, the goals of the Critical-Logical users many require extraction in particular circumstances (i.e., discussing potential fallacies).

2.1.2 Properly Conceived, the Descriptive Elements of the Critical-Logical Mode and the Alternate Modes are Similar

The above section explored some of the ways the coalescent approach and the critical approach to argumentation could be reconciled so as to form a theory of argumentation deemed suitable for theorists working in both traditions. In this section, I will explore in greater detail whether Gilbert’s description of the modes of argumentation can be reconciled with the Critical-Logical mode. As discussed in the first chapter of this

work, the two main hurdles to reducing the descriptive aspects of the four modes into one were the issues of premise source and translation.\(^8^0\)

The four modes of argument are differentiated by the varying sources of information a dispute partner relies upon when formulating premises or reasons. They may for example derive information from intuitive aspects, emotional responses, physical occurrences, or logical reasoning (inference from information already possessed). The idea that arguers gather evidence and information from such sources is not revolutionary. At its descriptive level, the Critical-Logical model of reasoning recognizes that arguers rely upon diverse sources. However, the normative aspect of the Critical-Logical mode goes one step further to recommend that arguers rely more heavily on the logical reasons than on the alternative visceral, kisceral, and emotional sources. So, at the descriptive levels, both the Critical-Logical and coalescent theories agree upon what sort of evidence arguers rely on. The divergence occurs when the issue becomes what type of arguments arguers should advance.\(^8^1\)

The matter of translating nonverbal occurrences into linguistic labels is a second issue in reconciling the descriptive theories of critical and coalescent argumentation. To remind my reader, the issue was that the Critical-Logical mode requires that all argumentative exchanges occur within language or behaviour that is either linguistic or linguistically explicable (describable in words). Gilbert, however, describes argument as a procedure that may occur linguistically or non-linguistically. In addition, he argues that the events which occur without language are not linguistically translatable, as the reason

\(^8^0\) The issue of the convince/persuade distinction is one abandoned by Gilbert, so I will not discuss it as one of the barriers to reconciling the two dogmas. The convince/persuade distinction is normative and does not preclude communications from 'argument' status.

\(^8^1\) To this issue, Gilbert does not offer assistance.
the arguer wishes to express exists in the behaviour, not in a linguistic shadow of it. So, if it can be argued that linguistic representations of argument relevant events were sufficient to capture the reason expressed by the arguer, then the descriptive content in the coalescent and critical approach would bear remarkable similarity.

Imagine a situation where a young boy comes home from school and walks across his kitchen floor wearing a muddy pair of boots. The mother's reaction to her son's behaviour is to scowl at him. The son, observing his mother's behaviour, takes off his boots and scurries up to his room. When it comes to capturing such communication as a scowl in an argumentative exchange, Gilbert instructs the theorist to describe the action within double brackets, such as [[mother scowls at son]]. This method of communicating actions and behaviours are adequate, according to Gilbert, as it is the behaviour itself that serves as a premise or reason within the argument. A theorist is not to further describe the behaviour, as it is not the description or interpretation of the event that communicates the message to the son. It is this reasoning that I take issue with. I argue that it is the interpretation of observed behaviours and actions that serve as the 'reasons' in human communications.

When the mother scowls at the son, the son is able, in reference to the context, to induce that the mother does not approve of his walking across the floor in dirty boots. The scowl must communicate this message, or the son would not pay notice to it. A scowl, on its own does not mean anything (or another way to look at the situation is that a scowl on its own could mean anything)—it is what this scowl represents that makes it worthy of acknowledgment. Gilbert is right to draw attention to the fact that messages

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82 I attribute this example to Professor Shawn Warren of Saint Mary's University.
83 Here a 'scowl' refers to a negative facial expression.
are conveyed through a variety of mediums, not merely the linguistic. However, he has incorrectly assumed that the medium is the message. Let us examine another instance of a non-linguistic message. Toby asks Marie if she loves him. Marie responds by pointing to her eye, then to her heart, and then to Toby. This behaviour, out of context in which it occurred may be nothing more than Marie making a series of hand gestures, but in this instance, Toby is able to equivocate the behaviour with “Yes, Marie loves me.”

Now, let us look at an example of this sort as it may occur within argument:

Kelly: I think that you are angry with me Ralph. You haven’t spoken a word to me in hours.

Ralph: [[Hurls the television remote control across the room.]]

Kelly: Gee, you really are angry.

We can look at this exchange and agree that Ralph was angry. But how did we arrive at that conclusion? Was it as Gilbert suggests through the premise of throwing the remote control? I suggest not. Rather, after reading a description of the event (or perhaps experiencing the event), our brains processed the information of behaviour and context and arrived at the conclusion that the behaviour represents Ralph’s way of saying “I am angry.” Behaviour is a mode of communicating a message; the behaviour itself is not the message. So when Gilbert writes that such non-discursive information “does not express a premise, it is a premise”, I take him to be mistaken.

It seems, then, that the non-linguistic elements that Gilbert wants incorporated within a description of argument does not pose any real threat to the doctrine of the

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Critical-Logical mode. The relevant non-linguistic events must be translatable into language as to capture the message intended for a dispute partner. I am at a loss to think of an incident where the message being conveyed cannot be represented in language. It seems to me that most propositional thought occurs, or is translatable, into linguistic messages. It appears that on a descriptive level, the two doctrines of argument are not entirely at odds with one another.

2.2.1 Gilbert Posits the Wrong Area of Study

As discussed in the previous chapter of this work, there are many competing definitions of the term 'argument'. Gilbert constructs his theory of coalescence with appeal to the rhetorical framework. There are two similar definitions of argument located within Gilbert's discussions of his works. The first defines argument as "any disagreement—from the most polite discussion to the loudest brawl," while the second further elaborates that "An argument is any exchange of information centered on avowed disagreement".

After reading Gilbert's work, it becomes evident that the term 'argument' is jumbled with a variety of related terms such as 'discussion', 'disagreement', and 'dispute'. We can here turn to Gilbert's definitions of argument, both of which characterize arguments as disagreements. It seems to me, that there is an important difference between these terms; in other words, they do not all isolate the same human behaviour, as Gilbert seems to suggest. In what follows, I will present a conceptual

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85 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation, 30.
86 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation, 104. (italics original)
analysis of these terms ('discussion', 'disagreement', 'dispute', and 'argument') to discover just where they diverge from one another.

A discussion is a series of acts of communication. It involves at least two people who, through language, exchange information. According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language,* a discussion pertains to the consideration of a subject by a group. To merely consider a subject does not require that there be disagreement among the members—the discussion may just be a conversation about a particular subject. The following encounter could be considered a typical discussion as it occurs between two people:

*Ben:* Hey Jake! Wasn’t that a great lecture? Do you remember in high school how the teacher would just make vague reference to facts? This professor really seems to know his stuff—I feel as if I was given the whole story by somebody who really understands it.

*Jake:* Yeah, I know what you mean. I was also impressed with the Professor’s use of technology. PowerPoint is a nice change from those old overhead projectors. I am really excited for class next week. I wonder what we’ll learn next.

The main point to stress here is that there need not be any conflict of opinion present in a dialogue in order for it to be considered a discussion.

A discussion differs from a disagreement in this requirement for conflict of opinion. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines ‘disagreement’ as:

3. Difference of opinion or sentiment.

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87 When discussing the definitions provided by various Dictionaries, I will only make reference to the specific definitions that are relevant to this work. Also, although dictionaries do not often offer a completely sufficient account of word meaning, they do serve as a good starting point.

4. A falling out, or controversy; difference.

When we say that there is disagreement between two people, we usually mean to say that two people do not hold the same position in reference to a particular topic. I may, for example, disagree with my professor about a mark I received for an essay.

A dispute is very closely related to the concept of disagreement; however, there is, I believe, a subtle difference between these two terms. To illustrate the point I wish to make, it will be helpful to look at the situations in which language users apply the two terms. For instance, I can intelligibly make the following statement: “I disagree with Sean”, however, to say “I dispute with Sean” sounds awkward. This is because ‘dispute’ is a term which is to be applied to instances where there is acknowledged disagreement between people. As the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary of Law*\(^8^9\) cites, a dispute is “an assertion of opposing views or claims”. This suggests that to dispute requires that two people be in an act of disagreement—they have made aware to one another their opposing views or claims. Disagreement, then, does not require action on the part of an individual who finds him or herself holding a position that differs from another person. In other words, to disagree with a person does not require that you approach them in a verbal or written manner to make them aware of the situation. The disagreement may take place solely in an individual’s mind, while to dispute requires that this disagreement be made known. That is, speech acts must be performed by both parties, directed to the other.

Where, then, does this leave argument? If we review Gilbert’s definition of argument, it will become apparent that it seems to suggest that ‘argument’ has the same extension as ‘dispute’. Before the relation between these two terms is examined, it will be

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necessary to lay a framework for the discussion by conducting a brief conceptual analysis of 'argument'.

'Argument', as discussed in the first chapter of this work, can have various meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In my analysis of this term, I wish to uncover a basic meaning that can serve as an adequate model for all of its uses. As a starting point, 'argument', broadly and commonsensically defined, refers to a goal-oriented communication where information is exchanged. This exchange of information must be of a certain sort for it to be considered within the realm of argumentation. For example, information can be exchanged between people through friendly smiles, or winking of the eyes, but these actions are not what an ordinary language user would want to label as arguments. Gilbert adds to this concept of argument the necessary requirement of disagreement. I would, however, claim that argumentation of the sort discussed by Gilbert, should in addition require dispute between partners, as his exploration of argumentation endorses the view that argument occurs between people who are aware of their disagreement on a particular issue. However, under this model of argumentation, there does not seem to be a distinction between argumentation and disputation. This, I believe, is a major flaw in Gilbert's description of argument—there is a central difference between a dispute and an argument, namely the offering of reasons for one's claim.91

90 There is disagreement within the field of argumentation theory whether an argument needs to be a communication which occurs between at least two people, or whether it can be an individual process where a person argues with him or herself. Although this issue is interesting and important, it will not be explored in this work, as the confines of this paper are too limited. I will use Gilbert's assumption that argument occurs between people.

91 This requirement will be explained shortly.
If we examine some of Gilbert's examples of argumentative occurrences, it becomes apparent that what really occurs is the exchange of information\textsuperscript{92} that two people disagree with one another, and the nature of that disagreement. Let us look at the example "Shrimp For Dinner."	extsuperscript{93}

Michael is sautéing some shrimp for the dinner he is making. Deanne asks him if he thinks adding a bit of curry is a good idea. Michael says no.

Deanne goes to the kitchen cupboard and begins searching all around. She seems to give up, but then gets the stepstool and begins rummaging through the upper shelves of the cupboard. Michael notices, but, busy with his shrimp, does not say anything. After a bit, Deanne climbs down, goes over to Michael, stands very close, and holds out a can of curry. "Are you sure you don't want to add just a little curry powder?" Michael looks from Deanne to the can of powder, and says, "Well, yeah, sure, O.K.."

If I were to summarize what is going on in the above example, it would be that Deanne wants curry in the shrimp, and Michael does not. This is not a clear case of argument; although each person has a position, neither position is enforced with a reason in support of their position. However, the reason that I say this is not a clear case of argument instead of denying it argument status altogether is because some theorists may allow that asserting a want or desire serve as reason in support of a conclusion (in this case the conclusion is 'you should put curry in the shrimp'). At best, then, this example of an argument exemplifies a borderline case.

\textsuperscript{92} I use the words "exchange of information" to refer to the verbal, visceral, and kisceral ways dispute partners can communicate the nature of their disagreement.

\textsuperscript{93} Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 84.
Gilbert could argue that Deanne’s rummaging in the cupboard is a reason in support of her position on the curry. We could summarize this behaviour as being roughly equivalent to: “Michael, I really want curry in the Shrimp.” However, it could be argued that this is just an expansion of Deanne’s original position, and does not serve as a reason for the acceptance of her position. On the other hand, the difference between Deanne’s wanting the curry and really wanting the curry could be said to be relevant to Michael’s acceptance of her position.

When I discuss ‘accepting a position’ it seems as if I am begging the question, as I am endorsing the very Critical-Logical criteria Gilbert criticizes. Gilbert wishes to construct a theory of argumentation that does not reflect the current doctrine of Informal Logic. He opposes what he believes to be an oppressive theory that is not based on the needs and abilities of real arguers. So, when I point out that his coalescent theory and description of argument does not endorse a Critical-Logical fundamental of argumentation, namely that arguments are a means to convey the goal of convincing/persuading, one’s opponent, am I not implicitly relying on the very canon Gilbert criticizes? The answer is that I am not. When I made the move from arguments as disputes to arguments as disputes with at least one reason in support of the position the dispute centers on, I affected the way in which Gilbert can refer to argument. In Gilbert’s use of the term, argument is merely two people disagreeing (or as I would suggest, disputing) about a certain topic. The type of outcome goals for an encounter of this sort could be numerous. For example, my outcome goal for telling my friend that I don’t

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94 Gilbert, if you refer back to chapter one of this work, denies that behavior can be paraphrased such as this. However, without doing so, I would not be able to communicate the point I wish to make.
95 I will discuss why this desire is not a reason for curry to be added to the shrimp in the next section.
96 This situation will be discussed further within my section on expressives.
97 I do not intend to discuss this distinction. It is a normative guideline ascribed by Informal Logicians, and does not necessarily affect this work. I will often use the words interchangeably, unless otherwise stated.
think that she should wear a particular outfit could be anything from my desire for her to look her best, to my desire for her to think the outfit looks horrible on her, and for her to give the outfit to me. However, when I begin to offer reasons for my position, (i.e., I don't think that you should wear the outfit because Marylou is wearing the same one tonight), I do so with the intention of having the other person accept my position.

When Gilbert discusses goals associated with argumentation, he does well to point out that there are many goals operating on different levels that will affect our behaviour. However, in order for an arguer to make the move from merely having a goal to satisfying this goal requires some sort of action. As Gilbert writes: “classically, and usually, the aim of an argument has been to bring an opposer around to the point of view the proponent is defending.”^98 Dispute, on its own, does not seem up to the task of accomplishing the goal of persuasion.^99 Merely stating disagreement with a partner will not suffice to accomplish the goal of persuasion. The way arguers accomplish the aim of persuasion is to communicate to their opponent why their position is more justified or worthy of belief or acceptance. Suppose, for example, that I am preparing for a dinner party and I have put my boyfriend in charge of cooking the chicken I plan to serve. I happen to notice that he has not cooked the chicken for a sufficient amount of time. I communicate to him that I do not think the chicken has been cooked long enough, and he counters by saying that he thinks it has (at this point we have satisfied Gilbert’s requirement for argument). It seems that I am at a stand still with my boyfriend (I am not engaging in any action that will encourage persuasion), and unless I take action, my

^98 Gilbert, Coalescent Argumentation 103. (Gilbert concerns himself with the difficulty of winning an argument in the sense that winning involves having the opponent accept the proponent’s conclusion into his belief set.)

^99 I assume that bringing an opposer around to the point of view the proponent is defending is to be relatively synonymous to persuasion.
guests are going to be fed undercooked chicken. If my goal is to get him to accept my position, I need to reinforce my claim with additional force. I need to give him reason\textsuperscript{100} to believe that he should agree with me—to this end I can use a meat thermometer and a list describing the internal temperatures necessary for fowl, to determine whether the chicken needs to be cooked longer. This would give my position persuasive force if the evidence supported my claim. Without including reason as a necessary condition for argumentation, the goal of persuasion will not be realized.

By not incorporating the requirement of reason into his definition of argument, Gilbert prevents the acquisition of the central aim of argument. If argument is about persuasion, then it seems to be an activity centered on the offering of reasons. These reasons need not be of the sort Gilbert would characterize as logical—they may be derived from visceral, visceral, or emotional sources. However, to return to the issue at hand (whether I am begging the question by making mention of persuasion), if argument is to be differentiated from dispute by being an activity pertaining to the realization of goals, then there needs to be some mention of the presentation of reasons and persuasion in a complete definition of argument.

Argument involves persuasion, but does the fact that a person has been persuaded indicate that an argument has occurred? In other words, are people only persuaded through argument? People modify their behaviour and beliefs for various reasons. Not all forms of communication that attempt to persuade are arguments. The three most common forms of statements that do not, on their own without reference to other factors, ...
offer *reasons* for belief, and thus, are not on their own arguments are: illustrations, explanations, and expressives.

Illustrations are statements that are intended to demonstrate or illustrate a point; they are often used to provide a verbal picture. Expressions such as, *for example, for instance, and it is illustrated by,* can usually serve as clues that a communicator is intending to provide an illustration as opposed to offering an argument. Take the following example: “Vincent van Gogh is a good example of the fine line between genius and insanity.” By making reference to van Gogh, I am not intending to offer a reason to believe that there is a fine line between genius and insanity, but rather that van Gogh exemplifies such a distinction.

An explanation, most easily defined, is an answer to a ‘why’ question.\(^\text{101}\) This answer generally takes the form of a *causal* explanation for some particular state of affairs, not to offer reason to believe the truth of some statement. For example, “Why were you late for the meeting?” is the question (or as a philosopher may say, the ‘explanandum’) and the reply “My car ran out of gas, and I had to wait for a city bus” is the explanation (or again in philosophical jargon, the ‘explanans’). The notion that an explanation is connected to questions of cause and effect is what separates the concept of explanation from other linguistic acts. “Why do you want mushroom pâté?” and the reply “Because I had salmon pâté last night” should not be considered as an explanation. The test to determine if an answer to a ‘why’ question is actually an explanation is to reverse the order of the situation. For instance, you can say to yourself, “The car running out of gas caused me to be late for the meeting.” If the cause and effect statement makes sense,

\(^{101}\) Depending upon how a question is worded, an explanation may be an answer to a ‘what’ question. For example, “What brings about X?”
then it is probably a correct formulation. The second example, though, of an explanation does not seem to meet this causal criterion.\textsuperscript{102} Let us look at the formulation: "The fact that I had salmon pâté last night caused me to want mushroom pâté this evening." This statement does not express causation in the usual sense of the term. Although last night's menu affects what this person may want to eat tonight, it doesn't govern or control this decision.\textsuperscript{103} In other words, the person could just have easily decided to eat salmon pâté again this evening—wants and desires are not normally conceived as the sorts of states that are controlled or directly caused by external factors. This is in opposition to the situation where the motorist runs out of gas. After the incident occurs (the car runs dry), assuming that there is no other way to get to the meeting on time, the motorist cannot then decide to get to the meeting on time. In other words, the causal event cannot be manipulated by desire—it is an event that is governed by laws of connection.

The issue of expressions of wants and desires connects us to the third type of statement that can be misidentified as argument—expressive statements. Expressives are uttered with the intention of communicating a psychological state (likes, dislikes, wants, desires, etc.). A good example of an expressive statement is "I like ice cream". Merely stating or suggesting a preference or dislike does not provide a dispute partner with a reason to believe a certain proposition. Let us look at the following example:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Peter:} There has been a lot of scientific evidence that God does not exist. I think that evolution is the more accurate model of creation.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{102} Some philosophers may debate whether explanations isolate causal connections (The works of Kant and Hume would be of interest here); however, I will not discuss this issue within this work as it is not central to my criticism of Gilbert.

\textsuperscript{103} Matters pertaining to the human psyche can be complicated by discussion of freewill. Again, I will not be arguing for views associated with freewill or determinism.
Seth: I believe that God exists.

Seth's statement of belief communicates his view on the topic. It does not offer Peter a reason to believe that God does exist.

This seems clear enough when the situation is described as pertaining to a belief. However, in the situations relevant to a dispute partner's wants, things seem more complicated. Let us return to the "Shrimp For Dinner" example. Deanne wants curry in the shrimp, and Michael does not. There is a dispute between the two people. However, this situation is escalated with Deanne's behaviour—she seems to really want the curry. Presumably because of Deanne's desire for curry, Michael changes his position, and adds the curry. Due to his change of position, it seems as if Michael has been persuaded to change his mind—but has he changed his position as a result of argument? Argument, to reiterate, requires a backing with reason for a position. The dispute between Deanne and Michael can be summarized as:

Michael: I don't want curry in the shrimp.

Deanne: I want curry in the shrimp.

At this point, it does not seem that there is anything going on in the communication that resembles argument—there are no reasons offered as to why either partner should change their position. However, Michael does change his position. This complicates the matter because it would appear that there must have been an argument between the two since the Michael adopted Deanne's position. Firstly, we can examine whether Deanne offered a reason for her position. It is true that Deanne engaged in behaviour that would seem to communicate that she really wanted curry in the shrimp. But how is this different from

\footnote{104 Found in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.}
her initial position that she merely wanted the curry? It is not different. A want is a want—the supposed backing for her position is a mere reiteration of it. So what we have at this point is a dispute. Further complication is added by the fact that Michael changes his position to one that is complementary to his dispute partner—he decides to add curry to the shrimp. The issue to be explored then is whether this change of position is indicative that an argument has in fact occurred. I contend that it is not. What has most likely occurred is that Michael acquiesced to Deanne. Michael decided on his own, and not through an argument provided my Deanne, that he would prefer to take an action that would please her.\textsuperscript{105}

However, on the other side of this debate, an objector may argue that Deanne has provided an argument. One way of describing the situation between Michael and Deanne would be:

Michael is sautéing some shrimp for the dinner he is making.

Deanne asks him if he thinks adding a bit of curry is a good idea.

Michael says no.

Deanne: “Are you sure you don’t want to add just a little curry powder?”

[I really want you to add curry to the shrimp]

[What I want matters to you]

[Because you care about me you should compromise between your wants and my wants]

[Adding curry to the shrimp would be a good compromise]

[You should add curry to the shrimp]

Michael: “Well, yeah, sure, O.K..”

\textsuperscript{105} I will discuss position change as an indication of argument momentarily.
When the encounter is rewritten in this way, it becomes apparent that the expression of desire is actually an argument. The reasons that Michael should add curry to the shrimp are just implicit.

The difficulty in determining whether or not there is an argument in the “Shrimp For Dinner” example arises when we attempt to draw the line that cuts off the amount of inferences we can make from a person’s behaviour. For example, let us imagine that I walked into the student cafeteria angrily yelling “Get me pizza now!” At first this speech act appears to be an order. However, for the people who are sitting in the cafeteria, my words and angry behaviour may have more relevance. Such observers may understand my message to be “I am really angry right now, and if somebody doesn’t get me pizza, I may do something harmful to a person in this room.” This would be an argument because it has the premise ‘you may get hurt if you do not get me pizza’ and the conclusion ‘you should get me pizza’. Thus, there is a problem in determining what sorts of inferences are sufficient for the ascription of argument.

An instance where behaviour is not intended to serve as a reason for the acceptance of a claim would be spontaneous behaviour such as yawning. In one instance I may yawn during a lecture and not mean to convey any message to the instructor, while in another instance I may intend to communicate the message that the lecture is boring. It seems then that the intentions of communicators may be the deciding factor in determining such borderline cases of argument. I will now return to discuss whether position change is always an indication of argument.

Within communicative contexts, people change positions often, and for various reasons. Let us imagine that I do not want to go grocery shopping but my roommate does want to go. If I choose to go, it could be as a result of persuasive reasons provided (such
as, if we don’t go tonight we’ll have nothing to eat tomorrow), or perhaps because my roommate looks sad and depressed, and I think that she may need my company. In both instances, it may be claimed that I have been provided with reasons that I should go grocery shopping. But have I been provided with reasons of the sort that pertain to argument? A reason, in the sense relevant to argument, communicates a rationale for the acceptance or rejection of a particular position. In the grocery shopping example where I was provided with the evidence that we needed food from the store, I was convinced to change my position by information relevant to the necessity of the trip. In the second example when I changed my mind out of consideration for how my roommate would feel if she went alone, I did so without a reason connected to the position—i.e. the benefits of buying groceries.

A change in position can result from argument or fear of consequences, or another list of factors a person considers when changing their mind (i.e.: sentimentality, loyalty, stubbornness, and so on). What the study of argument is interested in is the change of position due to an argumentative exchange, which requires the giving of relevant reason(s) for or against a particular position. By ‘relevant’, I mean to draw further attention to the necessity that the reason offered must pertain directly to the issue at hand. For example, “I am going to eat this banana because last week M.A.S.H. had a television viewing marathon” is not relevant to whether or not I should eat a banana. Position change, then is not indicative of argument—it is but one of the possible outcomes of argument and should not be confused with the other human factors that influence the decisions that we make.
We can now turn back to the "Shrimp For Dinner" example.\textsuperscript{106} It could be noted that Michael's change of position did not occur because of an argument between himself and Deanne. Reasons for why curry would taste better in the shrimp were never offered. Instead, Michael probably realized that a person who is important to him had a desire that he wanted to satisfy. He may have chosen to satisfy Deanne's desire as a way of avoiding conflict or a lengthy argument pertaining to the benefits of curry. He submitted to Deanne's position before an argument even occurred.

This is not to say that the dispute between Michael and Deanne could not have turned into an argument about whether on not either partner should do as the other wants. Deanne could have provided Michael with reasons why he should do as she desired. The relevant point is that she did not offer such reasons—the dispute could have moved in this direction, but it did not. However, one advocating that the "Shrimp For Dinner" example is an example of argument could suggest that the topic of the argument was whether Michael should add curry (not whether curry would taste good in the shrimp dish), and that he arrived at the conclusion that he should because Deanne wants him to add it.

Perhaps a clearer instance of an inadequate example of argument provided by Gilbert would be "A Creepy House":\textsuperscript{107}

"Did you buy that house, Paul?"

"No, I got a really creepy feeling when I was in there, and turned it down."

"But it was such a good price!"

"I don't care if they are giving it away. It gave me the creeps."

\textsuperscript{106} Found in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1.
\textsuperscript{107} Gilbert, \textit{Coalescent Argumentation} 87-88.
In this example, Paul offered an explanation as to why he didn’t buy a particular house. The first reason why this example fails to be an argument is that the exchange lacked the requirement of dispute—the two communicators did not hold or express conflicting positions. The second reason why the “A Creepy House” example fails to be an argument is because Paul did not offer (or intend to offer) his communication partner a reason to believe or accept a claim. Paul intended to communicate why he did not buy the creepy house as opposed to attempting to convince his partner that the house was creepy.

To further illustrate the diminished role the presentation of reasons play in Gilbert’s formulation of argument, we can refer to his description of coalescent augmentation. The coalescent procedure outlined by Gilbert on page 123 of *Coalescent Argumentation* recommends that an arguer participate in the following steps: 1) Explore his/her position, 2) Explore Con’s position, 3) Identify commonality between the positions, 4) Examine the modes each partner operates on, and 5) Explore the depth of the goals held by each partner. Nowhere in this analysis does Gilbert make reference to an exploration or presentation of reasons which support the positions the partners are disagreeing over. The following example of an argument progressing in a coalescent manner was taken from *Coalescent Argumentation*:

Holly and Lynn are working out their transportation arrangements for the evening. They have one car between them; present is a friend, Gloria.

**Holly:** So what’s happening tonight? Are you going to your class?

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108 Gilbert, *Coalescent Argumentation* 134-135. For stylistic purposes, this argument has not been reproduced exactly as the original. I will place brackets around the description of the coalescent move.
Lynn: Of course, I don’t want to miss it. But you really need to go to that meeting.

(Both ASGs [Apparent Strategic Goals] have been laid out—Holly’s going to the meeting and Lynn’s going to class.)

Holly: But then you can’t get home.

(Now there is a conflict between ASGs.)

Lynn: I’ll get home.

Holly: Never mind, “I’ll get home.” That’s a lousy neighbourhood. I need to know how you are getting home.

(Holly introduces another goal. Notice that it does not conflict with any other stated goal.)

Lynn: Don’t worry so much.

(Lynn is not respecting Holly’s anxiety; she would be better to move to the emotional mode.)

Holly: Listen—you’re getting home safely is more important to me than going to that meeting. So, if we can’t work something out, you take the car and I’ll stay home.

(Holly has now demonstrated that, given having to choose between certain goals, she will pass on the meeting.)

Lynn: But you should go to that meeting.

(Lynn’s goal is redeclared.)

Holly: Then we have to figure something out.

(Holly reasserts the conflict and her choice.)

Gloria: Wait. Why don’t I pick Lynn up after the meeting, and then, Holly, you can come and collect her at my place?

(Gloria offers a way to satisfy both of Holly’s goals.)
Lynn: Wouldn’t that be a lot of trouble for you? [Gloria shakes her head, no.] Then that works for me.

Holly: Yeah, but that’s an awful lot of driving around for me.

(The only solution found so far has an extra cost.)

Lynn: [Looks at Holly pointedly.] It’s not that much driving.

(Lynn here points out that goal satisfaction is rarely perfect.)

Holly: Good plan. I’ll pick you up at Gloria’s.

This example serves to illustrate how focusing on the goals of the participants can avoid unproductive communications such as spats and squabbles. What it does not show is how this coalescent enterprise is relevant to argumentation properly conceived. At various points throughout the above discussion there were differences in opinions and goals which may have prompted the beginning of an argument. For example, there was dispute between Holly and Lynn about who should get the car, however, neither partner offered a reason in defence of whether or not they should get the car. Instead of engaging in an argument, the incident was avoided by an option that was satisfactory to both parties. Although it is great that these two girls avoided a potential conflictual experience by coalescing, it is unfortunate that this encounter gets credit for resolving itself through argumentation—coalescent or otherwise. Neither partner has offered backing for a position; rather they sought a way to avoid an argument all together. It seems to me that the method of arguing coalescently is better conceived of as a way to resolve conflicts
peacefully through a bargaining of sorts or a method of arriving at a fuller understanding of a dispute partner’s position.

It seems to me, that Gilbert has not provided those of us interested in the study of argument a proper description of the event we so wish to study. Gilbert’s description of argument is inadequate, and his normative theory of coalescent argumentation does not pertain to the human communicative enterprise it claims to discuss. Although, Gilbert does not get his subject matter exactly correct, I do believe that his work can be made relevant to certain elements within the study of argument and can be said to offer important insights into the way in which people approach argumentation.  

2.3.2 Coalescent Argumentation Is Not Sufficient For Dealing with Inquiry

One variety of the claim that Gilbert posits the wrong subject of study, suggests that Gilbert has reduced the meaning of ‘argument’ to ‘negotiation’. Such a criticism centers on Gilbert’s insistence on agreement as the ideal end to argument as opposed to the acquisition of truth. People who endorse the Critical-Logical mode maintain that the overarching goal of Critical-Logical reasoners is to engage in inquiry, where inquiry is defined as an argument with the goal of ascertaining the truth. To this end, coalescent argumentation is an inadequate model. Imagine you are sitting in a philosophy class arguing with your professor about whether or not Jewish people should be exterminated. Let us imagine that the student takes the position that they should be exterminated, while the professor counters this position with expressed disagreement. Now, according to the five steps of coalescent argument, the first step to this argument would be for the student to acknowledge their goals for the encounter. Let us assume that the student’s goals are

109 I will discuss this at a later time.
to gain support in a movement against Jewish people and impress the professor with his/her intelligence. The second step in the argument process would be to uncover the professor's goals. Let us assume that these goals are to advocate human equality and to engage in an argument process that would not be frowned upon by the university he represents. The third step in the argument process would be to identify any commonality between the goals of the professor and the student. The strategic goals for the encounter do not seem to be reconcilable, as the student wishes to dismiss the very human rights the professor defends. The face goals of the two dispute partners may be similar as by arguing in a manner that the professor would interpret as representing intelligence, may be the sort of argumentation endorsed by an academic institute. For example, arguing imaginatively and honestly would probably be a goal of both proponents. The fourth step in the argument process would be to examine the mode in which each arguer conducts his argument. Let us assume that each partner argues in the Critical-Logical mode. The last step in the coalescent process is to explore the depth of the goals held by each partner. This exploration would yield information relating to the motives and values of each dispute partner. Such an exploration may provide evidence that both dispute partners value their freedom, and share the motive of being in the center of attention.

An engagement with the coalescent process gives forth opportunities for agreement between the two dispute partners. For instance, they can agree upon the importance of their public image and the value of freedom which a liberal society affords them. However, they remain to disagree on the topic of how the central issue of their argument affects these goals. The student believes that Jewish people have a global conspiracy to take over the world (thus limiting his freedom), and he believes that by uncovering this conspiracy and endorsing the annihilation of the Jews, he will forever
preserve his favourable image in the public’s eye. Contrary to this, the professor believes that the freedom he enjoys is a result of human rights, and that all people regardless of race or ethnicity deserve these basic rights. He believes that if one group of people are denied their human rights, freedom will no longer be a guarantee. In addition, the professor thinks that his noble pursuit of human equality will afford him great popularity.

It seems to me that without resort to the Critical-Logical method of criticism, there will not be progress made in this argument as to the issue of whether or not it is true that Jewish people should be exterminated. The focus in coalescent argument seems to be more on the wants and desires of the dispute partners, and less on the ascertainment of truth. Agreement is not an acceptable substitute for truth.\footnote{It could be the case that Gilbert implicitly holds that truth is determined through agreement. However, I can not say for sure whether Gilbert would ascribe to such a theory.}

As a possible solution to the dilemma of arguments aimed at inquiry, David Godden\footnote{David Godden, “Arguing at Cross Purposes: Discharging the Dialectical Obligations of the Coalescent Model of Argumentation” \textit{Argumentation} (2003) 17: 219-243.} suggests that the overarching goal of coalescent argumentation could be shifted from mere agreement to a goal that directs the maximal fulfillment “of the goal-set of the arguers in a specific instance of argumentation through \textit{coalescence}.” This overarching goal, when combined with the fact that the norms of argument evaluation are a function of the goals of argumentation, places the situation of inquiry within a specific argumentative context where specific norms may pertain. Thus, Critical-Logical arguments aimed at the acquisition of truth could still be evaluated in the preferred critical method. Gilbert provides us with the following example of how conceptions of relevance, sufficiency, and acceptability (R-S-A) can be relative to arguer and argument mode:
If the radio announces that Friendly Fish tuna is contaminated with botulism, I accept that fact and toss out my two cans. On the other hand, my grocer, who has stacks of the stuff and a multitude of customers who have carried tins away, needs to call the distributor and find out if this is true or a rumour. Both of us are using good judgment in evaluating according to R-S-A criteria, but by different standards because of different goals and needs. 

"Thus, if the ascertainment of the truth is one of the goals of an instance of argument, then the standard of truth is an apt standard on which to ground evaluative norms of argument." 

To this point, I state agreement with Gilbert and Godden that standards of argument evaluation are often relative to the framework in which the argument is grounded. However, when it comes to the framework that dictates the acceptability of the alternate modes of argumentation (the emotional, visceral, and kisceral), I am at a loss to locate it. Gilbert does state that he is interested in constructing such a framework, but the project is yet to be completed. It will be of great interest to me how Gilbert is to deal with the relational aspects of his theory when truth enters into the equation. It seems to me that he is opening the door to a theory of truth that would allow propositions about the world to be true for one person (i.e. the earth is flat) and false for another (i.e. the earth is spherical). However, I believe that the burden of proof would be on Gilbert to show how such a theory of truth would be acceptable.

113 Godden, “Arguing at Cross Purposes” 237.
114 Gilbert, “Comments on Bailin” 4.
The Moral Argument In Favour of Coalescent Argumentation Is Flawed

The moral imperative to overhaul the Critical-Logical mode of reasoning (as outlined in section 4.2 of Chapter One), argues Kathleen Miller, "is necessary only if one conflates values with modes of communication, which tend to be gender specific, with the business of being critical, which does not." This, I believe is a very crucial point that may affect the thrust of Gilbert's argument against the Critical-Logical mode of reasoning. Throughout "Feminism, Argumentation, and Coalescence," Gilbert cites examples of the differences between the values and communication modes of males and females:

Women are far more focused on their attachments to others, their place in the web of human relationships, and their connectedness to the people with whom they interact. Men, on the other hand, have independence from others, their status in the hierarchy of individuals, and their separation from control and obligation as paramount loci."

From these observations, Gilbert makes a leap to the conclusion that there is also a difference between the reasoning skills of the two genders. It is this logical gap that Miller finds at fault. As Miller writes: "It is the inference from differences in values to differences in reason which is questionable."

Women may tend to value their personal connections with others, and due to this communicate in a mode that represents such values. For instance, a woman may try not to communicate a message in such a way as to hurt the feelings of a listener. However, there is no reason to believe that due to such differences in values and communication

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116 Gilbert, "Feminism, Argumentation and Coalescence" 100-101.
techniques, women do not reason critically. The way a person reasons and the way in which they communicate this process are two inherently separate matters. Thus, there seems to be a distinction between mode of argumentation (communication) and mode of reasoning (critical). Take the following example:

Brent and Lorie are having an argument about what University their child should attend. Brent’s position is that the child should go to Dalhousie University, while Lorie’s is that Saint Mary’s University is the better choice.

Brent: “Dalhousie has excellent academic programs—far better than those offered at Saint Mary’s. If we are going to spend our money on school, we should invest in the best academic institute. Surely, you don’t think that Saint Mary’s could compete with Dalhousie in this respect.

Lorie: [Thinks to herself: Gee, I am quite critical of whether Dalhousie provides a better academic program than Saint Mary’s. Perhaps they maintain a better reputation, but this in no way means they offer a superior product. From what students have told me, Saint Mary’s has a top notch philosophy program. Since Sam plans on studying philosophy and not Biochemistry, I think that Saint Mary’s is the better choice. Even McLean’s magazine graded Saint Mary’s much higher than Dalhousie in their Art’s programs. If I say this bluntly, Brent will become even more adversarial, so maybe I can find a way to communicate my criticism of his point more diplomatically.]

“Yes, Dalhousie is an excellent school with a polished reputation, but I seem to remember reading MacLean’s magazine when they ran the articles on Canadian University’s. Perhaps we should have a look at it and see if there is a difference between the faculties of Arts and Science between the two schools. Maybe we could choose the school that has a better Philosophy program, since that is the subject Sam wants to study.
There is a distinction between what a person says, and what they think. In the above example, Lorie was critical of Brent's statement that Dalhousie was a better school for the academics. However, she did not communicate this criticism in a manner that was adversarial. Lorie was able to implement a plan that could accomplish her goals, while at the same time keep the peace in her relationship. The female concern for diplomatic presentation of argumentation does not infringe on the critical reasoning abilities of this gender.

When discussing argument in terms of a process that requires mental reasoning, we are leaving the framework for which Gilbert intends we remain. It does not seem that Gilbert explicitly acknowledges the reasoning process that occurs when a person decides what position to advocate and what reasons to advance to a partner. Rather, Gilbert concerns himself with the source reasons offered (emotional, visceral, and kisceral) and the manner in which this presentation occurs. Although it is true that Gilbert does discuss and categorize the realms an arguer may derive a premise from, he does not make mention of the reasoned process of determining the advantages or disadvantages of using such sources, or whether such reasons supplement 'good' reasons. However, the transition from viewing argument as communication, to argument as reasoning in action is a necessary move.

Our human ability to reason is prevalent among every aspect of the argumentation process. For instance, my ability to reason allows me to draw inferences, determine my position, decide when I should end the argument, and choose the reasons that best support my position. The Critical-Logical mode of argument is not only a normative theory for the formulation of good arguments, but also a descriptive model of reasoning. For instance, within the doctrine of logic (both formal and informal) there are descriptions of
the sort of reasoning process that humans engage in. A brief list of reasoning processes described by the doctrine of logic would include modus pollens, syllogisms, generalizations, and inductions. In addition to describing such processes, the Critical-Logical model provides guidelines for how to best apply these reasoning processes (i.e., do not commit fallacies). Perhaps Gilbert takes issue with the normative conceptions embodied in the Critical-Logical mode, but as far as I can tell, such issues do not pertain directly to morality. Gilbert may dislike the manner in which males have applied critical reasoning strategies in communicative contexts, but that is a fault on the part of males, not Logic.

So, if it is true that the male’s aggressive communication techniques alienate women, Gilbert rightly advocates the abandonment of such techniques. Miller argues that to merge critical abilities with a feminist perspective on communication would be an adequate solution for the moralist, the Logician, and the Feminist. Throughout an argument if we were to recognize the situation of the person supporting a particular position (i.e.: Does this person receive funding from a Pro-Life organization), and emphasize agreement with other accepted truths, then we would be arguing in a fashion pleasing to all. If arguments could be carried out in this way, they would greatly resemble Gilbert’s coalescent approach. However, there would be nothing in such an approach that is any less ‘critical’. For instance, positions would still be defended and criticised, but done so in a manner that represents the needs and abilities of arguers of both the male and female gender. It seems then, that the Critical-Logical mode of reasoning can be reconciled with a coalescent approach.
2.6 Concluding Remarks

Michael A. Gilbert has provided those interested in the study of argumentation a grave reminder that arguments are person relevant occurrences. Arguments are not the sort of events that theorists can study completely independent of their contextual occurrences. Perhaps the philosopher in his desire to conduct an unbiased and impartial examination of the world in which we live, lost sight of the fact that the way in which the world presents itself is, in a large way, a function of human perception. By shining light on argument as communication, Gilbert has renewed the importance of a descriptive analysis of argumentation.

In addition, Gilbert's recognition of the unnecessarily negative enterprise of Critical-Logical argumentation should be taken as a sobering observation for the critical theorist. If arguers feel the need to launch attacks against opposing claims, the attack should be an undertaking that appreciates the needs and feelings of others. Thus, arguers ought not act in a manner that disenfranchises fellow disputants.

However, on a more critical note, Gilbert's description of argument and his accompanying coalescent theory suffer from crucial flaws that deserve attention. It seems at least possible that the distinction between the four modes of argumentation and Gilbert's overall motivation to construct an alternate account of argument may be a result of mischaracterizations or misunderstanding of the Critical-Logical mode. In particular, the negativity and decontextualization that are allegedly endorsed by the Critical-Logical mode seem to be inaccurate. Perhaps the most significant criticism of Gilbert's work is that he has improperly defined and constructed the very topic of his research—argumentation. Gilbert's disregard of 'reasons' as a necessary condition for argument is a flaw in his theory which cannot in my view be reconciled without major overhauling of
the coalescent system as a whole. As it seems to me, the emphasis removed from reasons is what leads Gilbert to overlook the fact that reasons occur within the realm of the mental as opposed to the behavioural. In addition, I would contend that it is this neglecting of reasons that condemns Gilbert's theory to the barracks of Communication Theory, as opposed to bookshelves of Argumentation Theorists.
Bibliography


