

Goals In Argumentation

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According to the canons of Informal Logic the goal of an argument is to persuade one's opposer of the truth of the proffered claim. The argument, therefore, is always about the claim, and all argumentative activities focus on it. However, arguments occurring between people are more than propositionalizable entities which are Claim-Reason Complexes [CRC] whose structure is locatable. They are also communications occurring between two complex entities with a range of desires, needs and goals. It certainly may be the case that persuading one's opposer of the truth of a claim is *a* goal of a given argumentation, but it will rarely, if ever, be the case that it is the *only* goal of an argumentation.¹

Within Communication Theory the idea of goals is considered to be inherently manifold. That is, every persuasive interaction has more than one goal. On the one hand there is the obvious goal that is the apparent focus of the encounter, it is what an arguer wants to achieve. But, on the other hand, there are goals relating to the relationship between the arguers as well as goals dealing with the maintenance of the interaction itself. These have been called *primary* and *influence* goals (Dillard, 1990,) *task* or *instrumental* and *face* goals (Tracy & Coupland 1990,) and *instrumental* and *maintenance* goals, (O'keefe 1995.) 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. I shall use the terms *task goals* to indicate the goals forming the immediate strategic object of the encounter, and *face goals* to indicate the goals concerning the relationship between the participants, including their need to maintain (or terminate) the interaction.

Task goals and face goals differentiate between kinds of goals based on their objectives. A task goal might be quite clear and simple, e.g., gaining an increase on an essay grade, but might also come into conflict with a face goal, e.g., maintaining a good relationship with the professor who assigned the grade. The argument will involve both goals and the arguer will constantly be balancing the needs and dictates of one against the other. Much as when

¹ Examples of arguments when persuasion is not the goal include devil's advocate

arguments, and arguments intentionally undertaken to boost, for example, someone's ego or self-image.

driving a car one has to negotiate between speed, safety, and legal restrictions, conducting an argument must negotiate between the strategic objectives of the encounter and both social and relational restrictions.

Both task and face goals are situation specific. The needs and desires of the proponent determine the task goals, and the relationship between the proponent and opponent determine the face goals. Of course, this is not strictly true. For one thing, task goals might meld over into face goals as when the very object of an argument is to impact in one way or another on the relationship. For another, task goals might change as a result of conflict with face goals during the course of the encounter. As a result, it is important not to think of the two goal classifications as being either independent or invariably separable.

There is one other goal category that will be introduced. This is, to borrow from Dillard (1990) the category of *motives*. "Motives," Dillard writes, "are broad and deep-seated determinants of behaviour" (p. 72). Motives are the sort of goals that determine task and face goals in a broad general way. They delimit, if you will, the sort of goals one considers and acts upon as well as the sorts of actions one might use to obtain the goals. In the following the term 'goal' shall be used to refer to both task and face goals unless further specified, and 'motive' shall be used to refer to the more general goals as indicated above.

It should be clear that goals alone are insufficient to predict or delimit actions. A goal G to achieve an end E can be approached in an infinite number of ways. If Harry wants Jane's car to do an errand he could, for example, just take it. However, stealing the car is not even an option considered, let alone acted upon, because Harry has the motive of remaining honest. In addition, the face goal concerning his relationship with Jane would be violated were he to steal her car.²

I have argued elsewhere (Gilbert, 1995a) that understanding an opposer's goals is crucial in what I have called coalescent argumentation. This is an approach to argument that emphasizes locating points of agreement within positions, and builds upon those points to create a coalescent situation incorporating as much as possible of the divergent views. In the effort to bring an argument to a mutually agreeable end with both parties content with the outcome the number of satisfied goals must be maximized on both sides. So, while the very existence of goals, and, specifically goals of different sorts within the same communicative encounter, is descriptive, the utilization of these goals to achieve an harmonious end to an argumentative encounter is prescriptive. The understanding of the role goals play in argumentation, then, becomes important to a deeper understanding of practical reasoning.

Let each individual involved in an argument be considered to have the following *ordered* sets of goals. Note that the sets are ordered by a priority relation which ranks them in importance. Thus, Harry's task goal of doing an errand has a lower priority than Harry's motive of being honest and of offending Jane.

A set of motives, M = $\langle m_1, \dots, m_n \rangle$
 A set of task goals, T = $\langle t_1, \dots, t_n \rangle$
 A set of face goals, F = $\langle f_1, \dots, f_n \rangle$

² In some milieus, of course, taking something without permission is not precluded.

Moreover, it might not even damage or, at least, completely wreck the relationship.

all of which delimit a set of procedures, $P = \langle p_1, \dots, p_n \rangle$

Figure 1 M, G, T, P

'Procedures' are intended to cover arguments and argumentative moves construed broadly (Gilbert, 1995), so they will range from particular arguments offered and the way in which those arguments are presented, to non-linguistic communications intended to persuade or otherwise sway an opposer.

Goals, of course, are very complex things. They both direct and limit actions insofar as one goal might define a strategic objective, but another might restrict the ways in which that objective can be achieved. In addition, it is not uncommon to have goals, even of the same sort, that are in conflict. And tension, if not conflict, is invariably present in goals of different categories. Motives restrict task goals and face goals, and task and face goals limit and constrain each other. To further complicate matters, arguers often have goals that are kept hidden from their opposers and even from themselves, what we might call, following Walton (1989), "dark-side goals". In a negotiation, for example, one might be putting forward one position when the real goal concerns another. Even in a more heuristic argument, it would not be unseemly to present a position as more extreme than it need be in order to provide room for maneuvering.

Goals can be hidden from the person who holds them. We can be unknowingly self-destructive or self-defeating. We can be provocative or antagonistic without realizing that we are trying to evoke a particular reaction. We can think we are doing one thing for one reason only to realize later, with or without help, that we were completely wrong. An individual S 's set F for example, might contain a goal f_i which will have a negative face impact. This could result from S 's being angry at her opposer, but at the same time not realizing that she in turn wants to anger her opposer.

All of this creates great complexities when considering the question, What is the goal of an argumentation? If an argument is viewed as a CRC, then, presumably, the goal is to have one's opposer accept the claim as part of his or her belief set. But, in any particular argumentation, this may not be the actual goal. The proponent might, for example, actually want the opposer to *not* accept the claim, but to move to another related claim. In addition, a proponent might suddenly have another goal, say a face goal, that intervenes to cause a backing off of the original task goals. In Bavelas, et al, (1990) the role of equivocation in a discussion works to avoid conflict between task and face goals. An individual in a socially awkward situation will equivocate rather than offend or lie. One is caught in a snare of conflicting goals. Consequently, it is not possible to state, *simpliciter*, that the goal of an argument is to have the respondent adopt the claim.

The situation is further complicated when we consider that *both* the proponent and respondent have complex goal sets with internal as well as external inconsistencies. Yet, in order to effect an agreement opposer's must have a reasonable idea of what each others' goals are. It is unlikely that two arguers can come to an agreement when they do not understand the terms of the disagreement and the objectives of their opposer. Understanding a position (Gilbert, 1995a) is a more complex and multi-layered endeavour than is usually thought. But, here it is not so much the position, as the goals (including motives) that organize the position that is at issue.

The aim of what I call coalescent argumentation is to bring about an agreement between two arguers based on the conjoining of their positions in as many ways as possible. This

means that a full exploration of the positions must be undertaken in order to determine which aspects of a position are crucial, which are peripheral, and which might be held without due consideration. Clearly, the identification of the goals of the partners to the dispute will play a crucial role in bringing about a mutually satisfactory conclusion. Thought of simplistically, the more goals in each position that can be satisfied, the more likely it is that a coalescent termination can occur. This is simplistic, however, because the *number* of goals satisfied will rarely be a major factor. Insofar as goals are ranked in order of importance, the satisfaction of the top several goals may be vastly more important than the satisfaction of numerous lower ranked goals.

Let us consider that each individual *S* in an argument has a set of goals consisting of each of the sets indicated in Figure 1. Let us call *S*'s set of goals Γ_s . So, in an argument involving two partners, *S* and *T* each will have, respectively a set Γ that can be construed as follows.

$$\begin{aligned}\Gamma_s &= \{ \langle m_1, \dots, m_n \rangle, \langle t_1, \dots, t_n \rangle, \langle f_1, \dots, f_n \rangle \} \\ \Gamma_t &= \{ \langle m_1, \dots, m_m \rangle, \langle t_1, \dots, t_m \rangle, \langle f_1, \dots, f_m \rangle \}\end{aligned}$$

Figure 2 Γ_s

There is a very important question to consider before going further. The first is whether Γ_s indicates all of *S*'s actual goals, or only those goals that *S* knows him/herself to have. In other words, what is the extent to which it can be assumed that *S* is aware of the goals in Γ_s ? The answer is that since the concern here is with actual argumentative practice, Γ_s must contain only those goals that either *S* holds in awareness or would agree are held dispositionally. This is important to coalescent argumentation because part of the process is the participants *bringing into awareness* their own and their partners goals. Arguers not infrequently lack complete awareness of the goals they have in an argument. The emphasis is often placed on t_1 , the first task goal, and other goals are ignored. In the course of a coalescent argumentation the further members of Γ_s will be brought out and considered. This not only increases their likelihood of satisfaction, but opens the possibilities of the identification of mutually held goals.

Most arguments have one objective that is considered, by at least the protagonist, to be the main or paramount goal of the interaction. This will often, but not necessarily, be a task goal, and, in particular, the highest ranked task goal. This goal will be called the *apparent strategic goal* [ASG], or, more simply, the strategic goal. Consider the following example.

Example 1

Jim and Richard are arguing about who has done more of the food shopping. Jim insists that he has done far more than Richard. Richard replies that Jim does not mind the chore nearly as much as he, Richard, does. Jim makes one of the following replies:

A] That doesn't matter. We each do things we don't enjoy. It's your turn now.

B] I know that; but what will you do to even things up if I food shop all the time?

C] Well, has it occurred to you that asking me nicely instead of pretending you do as much as I do might work better?

With each of Jim's possible replies we can determine a different motive or goal. The previous argument might be essentially the same, but at this point, Jim's strategic goal leads him in different directions. In [A] the strategic goal is not doing the shopping. It is a task goal, and may very well be t_1 of Γ_s . In [B] the strategic goal appears to be a face goal with Jim seeking redress for his frequent shopping. Now he does not so much want to avoid shopping as use it as a means of balancing the chores on a broader scale. Finally, in [C], Jim does not want to avoid shopping and does not want any other redress. Rather, he has a motive, m_1 , which is to effect an alteration in the way Richard treats him. Now Jim is using the argument to persuade Richard that a motive of his—being up front with people when you want something—should be adopted.

As an argument proceeds one can make judgments concerning the goals of the participants, but caution must be used. It is quite possible that in Example 1 one would guess wrong in cases [B] and [C]. The apparent strategic goal is somewhat hidden. And, yet, it is important to the process of the argument to uncover the goals. If the argument had gone bad and the goals not been properly identified, then numerous opportunities for agreement might have been missed. When it is known that the strategic goal is [B], for example, then avenues of negotiation immediately open up. In the case of [C] the entire footing of the conversation might change, and it might be pursued on a more personal level.

Given the importance of goals in argumentation and how critical is understanding one's own and one's partners goals it is crucial to examine their role carefully. Two main parameters effect the role goals play in a given interaction between S and T. The first is the degree to which S is aware of her *own* goals, Γ_s , and the second is the degree to which the respondent T is aware of S's goal set Γ_s .

In the first instance, the requirement is that the arguer have an awareness of her own goals. This statement might seem odd, but it is not. Often an arguer will be aware of her ASG, but unaware of other less obvious goals. The other goals may belong to the set F of face goals, but can also be in T . The former is simple: One may not realize until circumstances force the issue that certain non-task goals play an important role in the argument. Not arousing anger, maintaining a pleasant demeanour, keeping a respondent on one's "good side," can be as or more important than a given task goal.

It is also the case that task goals can be, in the course of an interaction, re-evaluated or adjusted. Sometimes S can perceive her strategic goal as t_1 , but subsequently realize that another goal will also satisfy some other need. Consider a very simple example.

Example 2

Susan asks Tom if she can borrow his car. Tom refuses, saying the he needs it himself. Susan argues that she has an important conference 30 miles west of town. Tom says that, as a matter of fact, he is going that way and can drop her off in the morning and pick her up in the afternoon. Susan agrees with thanks.

An analysis of this example shows that Susan went in with the ASG of obtaining the loan of Tom's car. Tom presents Susan with a dispreffered response to her request. At this point, an arguer can do one of two things: First, she can remain focused on her ASG (t_1), or she can open up her set T of task goals to consider other, secondary goals. One way of considering this is to view the encounter as involving a higher goal, perhaps a motive, m_1 , of say, fulfilling her work obligations. When the ASG is blocked it might be abandoned, but

often the motive that led to it is not. That is, S needs a car to get to the meeting. The ASG is the borrowing of T's car. When that is not possible, the motive that dictated the request to borrow a car then becomes the ASG *if the arguer is sophisticated enough to alter goal strategy*.

Similarly, if we turn to the second of the two aforementioned parameters it becomes obvious that the greater awareness T has of a dispute partner S's set Γ_s , the greater the likelihood that the argument can come to a jointly satisfactory conclusion. If T is 1) aware of S's goals, and 2) sufficiently sophisticated to be able to consider the goal set beyond the ASG, then there is considerably increased likelihood that T will be able to find a coalescent conclusion. Awareness of an opposer's goals permits a dispute partner to find satisfactory outcomes that might be mutually agreeable, and, hence, coalescent. When, in Example 2 Tom learns that Susan's broader goal is reaching a specific destination, he is able to suggest a means of satisfaction not previously on the table. In other words, there are goals in each arguer's set that can be satisfied by a given outcome.

Another way to express the role of goals in an argument, especially in a coalescent argument, is that the larger the set $\{\Gamma_s \cap \Gamma_t\}$, the greater the likelihood of a mutually agreeable outcome. But it is imperative at this point to recall that a given set Γ_i , contains only those goals the proponent I is aware of or would agree she/he holds dispositionally. This means that, in the process of argumentation, one very important task is the drawing out of a respondent's goals in order to increase the likelihood that $\{\Gamma_s \cap \Gamma_t\}$ will not be empty. When an arguer T increases his awareness of alternates to S's ASG, and, at the same time, opens S up to those same alternates, Γ_s grows in size. Consequently, the possibility of $\{\Gamma_s \cap \Gamma_t\}$ being larger increases as well.

One response to this approach is that it makes all arguments negotiations. Treating all arguments as negotiations ignores the role of truth, correctness, and, in moral arenas, such normative factors as justice, rightness, and so on. But this is just wrong. Both parties to a dispute can hold motives and goals that are very similar in which case there is likely to be greater focus on the heuristic aspects of argumentation. The fact that, more often than not, there are (in particular) face goals that interfere with the purity of inquiry does not mean that, even in those cases, determining the truth of a proposition or the value of a solution is not a highly prioritized motive of both parties. The goal of coalescent argumentation (Gilbert, 1995a) is an agreement based on maximally fulfilling the goals and needs of the arguers involved. As the most common form of argument is not pure inquiry but, at best, eristically tinged inquiry, it does not behoove us to be overly concerned with those few instances, however precious they be, of pure heuristic inquiry.

One important objective for theorists in Argumentation Theory is the development of a formal structure to capture the natural operation of goals as held by one person and as utilized by two persons interacting in a conflictual situation. A number of serious complexities concerning the development of such a formalization must be recognized. First, as discussed above, there is the awareness factor. That is, the extent to which the holder of a goal set Γ_s is aware of the extent, variability and range of her own goals. Secondly, there are the inconsistencies that always exist between goals held by an individual. These can be, first and foremost, between different *types* of goals, as when face goals limit the kinds of reasons one is willing to present to achieve a strategic goal. But there can also be tension within a given type of goal. One might, for example, have the goal to demonstrate both affection and

firmness in an interaction. Or, one might have the goal to both seem clever and bright but not to overshadow one's partner. These situations can create complexities with a set of goals even of the same sort.

A separate sort of difficulty arises in ordering goals. First, the problems just described create ordering difficulties. But, even worse, S might be mistaken about her own goal ordering, it might change *en passant*, or goals ranked highly by type may well be incommensurable. Many moral dilemmas, for example, involve choices between face and task goals. Questions about how goals can be utilized abound: Can values be assigned to goals within the same category? Or, are there goals within a given set that cannot be ordered? Can values be assigned to goals that permit them to be compared even when of different types? Would such a comparison be useful in determining how to deal with conflict between goals? The formal analysis of goals in argumentation must answer these questions and many others while at the same time not oversimplifying the concept of 'goal' so as to render it sterile.

Coalescent argumentation is argumentation focused on agreement. It builds on the premiss that arguments are complex social activities that involve human egos seeking to satisfy their intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual needs. In the course of seeking the satisfaction of these needs there is conflict and disagreement. This can be over beliefs, the limited availability of resources, or questions of control and power. By becoming aware of the role goals play in argumentation, arguers can better focus on securing their own needs as well as attempting to satisfy those of their opposers. When the satisfaction of needs is maximized, the opportunity for a mutually agreeable conclusion is maximized as well.

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