

# Argumentative Role Ethics in Islamic Dialogue Theory

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**Abstract:** Islamic dialogue theory, developed through the *Munāẓara* tradition, introduces a distinct model of argumentation and a unique type of dialogue not yet captured by existing typologies.

While pragma-dialectics upholds a single, idealized normative framework, and dialogue theory distributes norms across multiple types, Stevens (2026) argues that both neglect the ethical responsibilities built into argumentative practice.

Building on her account, I show that in *munāẓara*, argumentative roles are procedurally indeterminate and inherently negotiable. Decisions about sequencing, burden of proof, what counts as a move, and how one flavors a role involve a continuous negotiation of the rights and obligations of each party.

**Résumé:** La théorie du dialogue islamique, développée à travers la tradition *Munāẓara*, introduit un modèle d'argumentation distinct et un type de dialogue unique qui n'est pas encore pris en compte par les typologies existantes. Alors que la pragma-dialectique privilégie un cadre normatif unique et idéalisé, et que la théorie du dialogue répartit les normes entre différents types d'échanges, Stevens (2026) soutient que ces deux approches négligent les responsabilités éthiques inhérentes à la pratique argumentative. En m'appuyant sur son analyse, je démontre que dans le *munāẓara*, les rôles argumentatifs sont procéduralement indéterminés et intrinsèquement négociables. Les décisions relatives à l'enchaînement des interventions, à la charge de la preuve, à ce qui constitue une manœuvre et à la manière de nuancer un rôle impliquent une négociation constante des droits et des obligations de chaque partie.

**Keywords:** applied role ethics, dialogue theory, flavor, *munāẓara*

## 1. Introduction

Argumentation theory has long debated how normative models can adequately capture the complexity of argumentative interactions. While some theories, such as pragma-dialectics, propose a single normative

ideal governing all argumentative exchanges, others, like Walton and Krabbe's (1995) dialogue theory, suggest multiple, context-dependent normative frameworks, each characterized by distinct procedural rules on commitment, starting points, and end goals. Despite these differences, both approaches often overlook how procedural rules alone do not fully dictate interlocutors' behavior in real argumentative interactions. Recognizing this gap, Stevens (2016, 2019, 2026) argues that an explicit integration of argument-role ethics—concerned with the moral responsibilities and choices in performing argumentative roles—is necessary. By turning to the Islamic argumentation tradition of *Ādāb al-Baḥth wa al-Munāẓara*, this paper reveals that argument-role ethics is not only an ethical necessity but procedurally inevitable. The Munāẓara tradition exemplifies how even a meticulously regulated and turn-based argumentative procedure cannot eliminate interpretative flexibility concerning interlocutors' rights and obligations. Despite clearly outlined procedural steps for the protagonist (*mu'allil*) and antagonist (*sā'il*), texts from this tradition show debates and divergent interpretations regarding exactly how argumentative roles should be enacted at specific junctures. Crucially, this procedural indeterminacy makes ethical considerations of argument roles unavoidable. The argumentative choices interlocutors face—such as whether an antagonist should immediately react to a claim or wait patiently for argumentation by the protagonist—do not merely involve strategic or dialectical efficiency but inherently reflect ethical decisions about how each party should position themselves and interact with their counterpart. Even minor procedural choices influence how we perceive the dialogue, the roles we intend to play, and the roles we expect from others.

Since this paper engages in debates regarding what it means to be a '*sā'il*' or a '*mu'allil*,' it might be helpful to begin with these terms themselves. In this paper, I translate *sā'il* and *mu'allil* as antagonist and protagonist respectively, following the convention used in contemporary argumentation theory. Despite their accuracy, I do not use Walter Edward Young's (2015) translation—"questioner" and "causal justifier"—because these terms might sound unfamiliar. The term "questioner" also suggests a degree of initiative that properly belongs to *jadāl*, where the one who asks questions will open the dialogue by testing whether the respondent holds a position. In *munāẓara*, this order is

reversed: The *mu'allil* begins, appointing themselves to offer justification through established patterns of reasoning, while the *sā'il* assumes the role of examining and testing that justification. This reversal may appear to change how the antagonist's role is understood, where a form of "hierarchy" is established between both sides. However, as we will see, the rights and obligations associated with these roles are not settled in the tradition: In some accounts, the *sā'il* is expected to act cautiously, seeking clarification and maintaining procedural modesty; in others, they are encouraged to take a more assertive stance, challenging and contesting the *mu'allil*'s claim. These two interpretations yield distinct understandings of how epistemic and moral responsibilities are allocated between the parties. The apparent hierarchy implied by the words themselves—one giving reasons, the other asking—does not capture the dynamic balance that the practice of *munāẓara* continually negotiates.

To explore argumentative role ethics within *munāẓara* tradition, in the second section, I briefly introduce dialogue theory's typology and the concept of dialogue shifts, highlighting the difficulties Walton and Krabbe encountered with ambiguities surrounding "flavors" and "shifts" as a subtle mixture between dialogue types as a case in point. This ambiguity leads pragma-dialecticians to criticize the idea of a multi-norm dialogue theory. In response, dialogue theory jettisons the concept of flavor, which could have been understood in terms of role-making. In the third section, I detail Stevens' (2026) argument for incorporating ethical considerations into argumentation through the roles arguers perform. The fourth section offers a thorough analysis of *munāẓara* as a distinct dialogue type aiming for the manifestation of truth, different from a persuasion or inquiry dialogue; emphasizing its strict yet interpretatively open procedure regarding protagonist and antagonist roles. We also see that in terms of commitments, *munāẓara* makes a differentiation between the protagonist and the antagonist roles: While the protagonist's commitment retraction is problematic, the same does not apply to the antagonist. The fifth section expands upon the roles of the protagonist and antagonist, showing that these roles were far from established. It is up to each party to identify their roles, as well as the rights and obligations these involve. The sixth section details the debates within the *Munāẓara* tradition on sequencing argumentative moves of the antagonist, extending the debates on what

it means to be a protagonist or an antagonist. This further demonstrates how procedural prescriptions inherently entail ethical decisions about role design and subtle role shifts, incorporating flavors. It is through these role shifts that, while remaining in a *munāẓara*, one can opt to perform their role in different ways, as an information-seeker, a refutational inquirer, or an ardent persuader. This section demonstrates how even slight procedural choices can lead to intended or unintended consequences, and the moral responsibility lies with the arguers themselves.

## **2. Dialogue types, shifts, and flavors**

In this section, I will briefly introduce dialogue types, discuss how illicit shifts from one dialogue to another are considered fallacious, and introduce the notion of "flavor," a concept proposed and later omitted from dialogue theory. My goal here is to elaborate on how these constructs expand the scope of argumentation theory. However, as seen in the later abandonment of flavor as a viable concept, the dialogue theory needed to jettison some aspect of argumentative reality in order to design normative models. The thirst for fallacy-detection leads to ignorance of important aspects of argumentative reality. This section will serve as a foundation for the upcoming section, in which I agree with Stevens on the necessity of a multi-norm set of argumentation theory as well as role ethics in argumentation.

Dialogue types, their functions, and corresponding rules have been extensively discussed in the literature of argumentation theory. Dialogue types serve as a normative ground for dialectification (Walton, 1992), where legitimate and illegitimate moves are understood within the interaction between parties. After this introduction, I will examine how dialogue theory is criticized by pragma-dialecticians in terms of the normative-descriptive dichotomy and how they argue that the theory's approach to fallacies is obscure due to confusion between dialogue shifts and flavor shifts. In response, the dialogue theory drops the discussion of flavors from its program—an aspect of argumentation that could be better understood not in terms of dialogues *per se*, but as role-making.

Walton and Krabbe (1995) distinguish six fundamental dialogue types: persuasion, inquiry, negotiation, information-seeking, delibera-

tion, and quarrel. Over time, the number of main types and their subtypes has increased (Walton, 2010). Each of these types serves as "a normative model which specifies broadly how an argument should be used in order to be correct or to be defensible against criticism that it is incorrect, erroneous, or fallacious" (Walton, 1998, p. 3). Here, dialogue is defined as follows:

A goal-directed conventional framework in which two speech partners reason together in an orderly way, according to the rules of politeness or normal expectations of cooperative argumentation for the type of exchange they are engaged in (Walton, 1998, p. 3).

Each dialogue type has its own institutional goal; interlocutors have their own individual goals within it, which determine expected behavior. While some types of dialogue have clearly established norms, others, like everyday chit-chat, are based on conversational maxims and assumptions of politeness (Walton & Macagno, 2016).

Walton and Krabbe's (1995) primary interest in dialogue types seems to be the persuasion dialogue. Persuasion dialogues and their subtypes, such as critical discussion, are always explained first. This, in turn, relates to persuasion's focus on concessions and rejections of commitments by the parties—a quality that makes formalization easier. In persuasion dialogues, the initial situation is a conflict of opinions, and the individual aim of the arguers is to persuade each other. Persuasion is achieved by employing premises conceded by the other party. These types of dialogues allow the retraction of commitments as a principle. Contrary to persuasion dialogues, inquiries set out from an open problem rather than conflicting points of view between parties. In this type of dialogue, the parties aim to establish a cumulative "proof" through a process (Walton & Krabbe, 1995). In this process, parties arrive at conclusions that are thought to be true, and they build upon these conclusions; thus, they do not need to retract commitments along the way. This comes with the extra burden that once a conclusion is established, it is expected to remain there. Because inquiries aim to "minimize, or even eliminate, if possible, the need for later retractions" (Walton, 1992, p. 95).

While persuasion dialogues are adversarial in nature, inquiries are the contrary: they are highly collaborative. Nevertheless, the situation

changes when we think of commitments. The retraction of commitments is not that scandalous in persuasion dialogues, whereas in inquiry dialogues, they might come with reprimands. Walton and Krabbe (1995) find many similarities between inquiries and Aristotelian demonstration. Walton (1998) speculates that demonstration might be classified as a subtype of inquiry, since in a demonstration as well, the conclusion is presumed to not be known, and by building on premises known or established to be true, the demonstrator aims to arrive at knowledge. It is, therefore, necessary that commitments should not be touched upon again later. This is why circular reasoning is fallacious. Since conclusions are more obscure and controversial than the premises in the demonstration, it is not possible to reach the truth by going backwards from conclusions to premises.

In inquiries, both parties are regarded as ignorant of the solution (Walton & Krabbe, 1995). This contrasts with information-seeking dialogues where an asymmetry between parties is presupposed. This is not the case in persuasion dialogues, where either party is presumed to require persuasion. In quarrels, the parties do not aim to solve an open problem nor to persuade each other. Parties vent their feelings towards each other, the benefit of which is supposed to prevent the parties from further, even physical, violence. The mentioned dialogue types do not involve any shift or a flavor of another dialogue, but there are also "mixed" dialogue types, with debate being the most prominent example; in debate, the overall goal of the dialogue and the individual aim of participants might clash, reminiscent of dialectical reasonableness and rhetorical effectiveness elaborated in the extended pragma-dialectical theory (van Eemeren, 2012; van Eemeren et al., 2012a, 2012b).

Walton and Krabbe acknowledge the practical complexity of dialogues, where shifts frequently occur from one dialogue type to another. These shifts can be licit—improving dialogue by transparently embedding one type within another—or illicit—concealing fallacies or deceptive tactics:

A shift can be licit or good in the sense that a dialogue of one type is functionally embedded in another and improves the quality of the latter dialogue. In other cases, however, the shift, being illicit, conceals a fallacy, an error, or tricky deception in the argument (Walton & Krabbe, 1995, p. 2).

The concept of dialectical shifts is directly linked to traditional fallacies. Walton and Krabbe argue that fallacies often stem from concealed or illicit shifts between dialogue types. For example, the *argumentum ad baculum* represents an illicit shift from persuasion dialogue to negotiation, identified as the fallacy of bargaining, because rational argumentation is replaced by coercive threats. Similarly, other fallacies like *ad misericordiam* and *ad hominem* are also understood as illicit shifts from persuasion or critical discussion to dialogues such as negotiation or quarrel. According to Walton and Krabbe, identifying these fallacies requires examining participants' explicit consent to the dialogue shift and their subsequent adjustment of commitments.

The dialogue types model creates more problems alongside serving the goal of dialectification. To begin with, each dialogue has many subtypes, whereas "shift" becomes a genus of sorts, with many different species to be studied and examined. A shift can be internal or external; sharp, leading to a displacement; or gradual, leading to a glissement; licit or illicit, leading to a fallacy or not; forming a complex dialogue where one dialogue is embedded within another, or resulting in a mixed dialogue involving more than one dialogue type. However, it is not easy to pinpoint the exact degree of this mixture (see Walton & Krabbe, 1995; Walton, 1998). Walton and Krabbe hold that while mixed or complex dialogues can be modeled to some degree, uncertainty arises when it comes to the applicability of flavor as a reliable concept for theorization (1995, p. 116).

The concept of "flavor" recognizes that dialogues may primarily remain of one type but may also subtly incorporate elements of another. These flavors are not fully realized shifts but rather overtones or admixtures that affect the dialogue's character without entirely changing its fundamental type:

From a descriptive point of view, a particular speech event can exhibit two types of dialogue throughout without there being an explicit shift. We sometimes say there is one type of dialogue along with a flavor of another type, meaning the one is dominant, the secondary type less explicit (Walton & Krabbe, 1995, p. 82).

However, this nuanced conception of flavor introduces complexity and ambiguity into normative assessments. Walton and Krabbe themselves acknowledge difficulties in precisely defining and identifying

these subtle intrusions, admitting that it "remains to be investigated whether 'flavor' is a viable concept for use in the systematic description of dialogues and to devise empirical criteria to identify flavor shifts in given cases" (Walton & Krabbe, 1995, p. 118).

This ambiguity drew critiques from van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2007), who argue that Walton and Krabbe's approach conflates normative and empirical dimensions, complicating the clear evaluation of argumentative moves. Van Eemeren and Houtlosser's critique unfolds along two main lines. First, they challenge the notion that each dialogue type inherently possesses distinct normative properties:

In Walton's approach, which he developed further in collaboration with Krabbe (1995), the context of argumentative moves can be specified by describing the type of dialogue they are part of. Walton's view that fallacies are context-dependent is based on his 'pluralistic view' that argumentation needs to be judged as correct or incorrect 'in relation to a multiplicity of different models of reasoned dialogue.' (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2007, p. 60)

Instead, they propose adopting the critical discussion as a single normative standard applicable across all argumentative interactions, viewing other dialogues, such as deliberation or inquiry, as empirical activity types. They argue that arguers always strategically maneuver between dialectical reasonableness (adherence to norms of rationality) and rhetorical effectiveness (persuasive success). Thus, fallacies are not primarily shifts between dialogue types but rather failures of strategic maneuvering, where an arguer prioritizes individual rhetorical aims over the dialectical ideal of critical discussion.

Van Eemeren and Houtlosser's second critique relates to ambiguity between "shifts" and "flavors":

An additional aspect of the lack of clarity we perceive in Walton's shift approach is that it is not adequately explained whether a move is fallacious when there is a shift in flavor, when elements from other dialogue types intrude the original dialogue (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2007, p. 66).

Indeed, Walton and Krabbe (1995) explicitly discuss flavor shifts in the context of fallacies:

A question like ‘Have you stopped cheating on your income taxes?’ could be nonfallacious if the antagonist had previously conceded cheating on his tax returns. But otherwise, it could be a quarrelsome tactic to try to browbeat an antagonist into committing himself to some incriminating proposition, forcing him to make the effort of challenging the legitimacy of asking such a question within the type of dialogue in which the arguers are engaged. This fallacy involves a flavor shift toward an interrogation. (Walton & Krabbe, 1995, p. 121)

This illustrates the difficulty in distinguishing clearly between genuine dialogue shifts and subtle flavor intrusions, raising doubts concerning the practical and theoretical usability of the concept of flavor.

Perhaps as a response to these criticisms, Walton stopped discussing flavors altogether, increasingly emphasizing concepts like strategies and embedding, which were already present but less pronounced in the 1995 framework. His incorporation of strategies seems more related to the formalization of dialogues. Embedding, on the other hand, introduces a new vocabulary, such as local and global levels:

A global judgment needs to be made on whether the shift is an embedding or not, based on the goals of the two dialogs and the order in which they occur. Another factor is the pinpointing of the shift at the local level. As observed above, some shifts are gradual and others take place at a specific move in the dialog sequences. (Walton, 2007, p. 241).

These concepts become more prominent in subsequent works, reflecting an attempt to provide clearer criteria and procedural transparency for evaluating argumentative interactions. It is questionable whether Walton’s decision to abandon flavors was a wise move. Instead, they could have been more cautious not to attach the concept of fallacy to cases of flavoring. I believe that, in their terminology, the notions of local level and global level, along with the idea that a shift from one dialogue to another serves the purpose of the original dialogue, are sufficient to differentiate between a dialogue shift and a flavor shift.

We have seen how the concept of flavors was introduced and later abandoned by the dialogue theory. This abandonment, as I will argue, is a sign of argumentation theory’s partly justified focus on single-set or multi-set norms. While theorization will always come at the expense of argumentative reality, argumentation theorists cannot run away from the responsibility of addressing the complexity and ambiguity of real

argumentative interactions. It is within this complex framework that arguers interact, understand, make, perform, and shift their roles throughout the argumentative process.

### **3. The necessity of role ethics in argumentation**

In the previous section, I examined dialogue theory's concepts of shifts and flavors, noting how the abandonment of "flavor" illustrates the tension between theoretical clarity and the complex practical realities of argumentative interactions. In this section, following Katharina Stevens' approach, I explore her argument that a comprehensive normative argumentation theory must explicitly incorporate moral reasoning, accounting for arguers' continual responsibility at both the meta-level and object-level decision-making about argumentation. Stevens' project, first articulated in her earlier papers (2016, 2019) and later further developed in her 2026 book, rejects single-set normative frameworks such as pragma-dialectics for being too restrictive. On the other hand, multi-set frameworks such as dialogue theory, while enlarging the scope of the field, still give the impression that once different types of dialogues are learned, arguers are relieved from making moral choices. This is far from the truth, as argumentation involves a moral aspect through argument design that requires role-taking, making, and shifting.

Stevens addresses a gap in argumentation theory, noting that traditional approaches inadequately address the moral dimensions inherent in argumentative practice. Argumentation inherently carries risks of causing "unjust practical and epistemic losses" (2019, p. 695), which can result either intentionally through deceit or unintentionally through the structural design of argumentative interactions. Particularly, even adherence to established norms does not immunize arguers against causing harm, as arguers can "purport to follow argumentative norms while secretly breaking them" (2019, p. 695) through subtle methods. Thus, argumentation theory, if it aims to guide practice comprehensively, cannot simply rely on abstract sets of dialectical, rhetorical, or logical norms. Rather, it must recognize the moral implications of every argumentative move.

She extends her critique by emphasizing structural harms embedded within argumentative roles themselves (Stevens, 2019). Certain roles prescribed by argumentation, such as proponent or opponent, may implicitly disadvantage specific participants due to conflicting external

expectations or unequal power relations, such as when women are socially expected to be more nurturing than adversarial. However, such problems are not restricted to gender alone; similar issues arise in hierarchical contexts—for example, a worker arguing with a superior, or participants bound by external obligations conflicting with their prescribed argumentative role. In these scenarios, arguers may face insurmountable difficulties performing their assigned roles, resulting in unjust practical or epistemic losses. In the following sections, I will claim that when we consider both the rights and obligations of parties in a dialogue, what constitutes being an antagonist or protagonist is far from clear, and therefore, it is inevitable that each party designs its roles through negotiated rights and obligations.

Stevens' (2026) development of these ideas shows that moral considerations are an essential component of normative argument design. Arguers do not merely adopt pre-defined roles mechanically but rather continuously engage in "role-taking" and "role-making" processes. Arguers begin with roles that are socially learned and recognized through ongoing interactions, characterized by flexible combinations of goals, obligations, and typical behaviors. However, these roles are never entirely fixed; they necessitate active adaptation or even complete redefinition based on interlocutors' responses and changing contexts. Consequently, role-taking becomes a morally charged action, as each decision about how one plays a role shapes the subsequent argumentative space, influencing interlocutors' capacity to contribute meaningfully. "Role-shifting" becomes central to understanding argumentative interactions from a moral standpoint. It describes adjustments arguers make not just between different argumentative roles, but also within nuanced changes that affect the tone, intensity, or nature of their contributions without formally altering the dialogue type. This insight relates closely to the previously discussed notion of "flavor" from Walton and Krabbe (1995). Even subtle shifts in argumentative style, such as slight increases in assertiveness or subtle incorporations of rhetorical strategies, have moral implications, potentially reshaping the interaction as well as the interlocutors themselves.

Neither single-set nor multi-set normative theories sufficiently address these dynamic moral considerations. Single-set theories, such as pragma-dialectics, assume a stable, idealized, context-independent nor-

mativity, overlooking the continuous moral reasoning arguers must engage in at each move. Multi-set theories, including dialogue theory, though more flexible, still presume the arguer's ethical responsibility diminishes once a suitable dialogue type and associated norms are selected. This assumption overlooks the perpetual moral burden arguers carry. Thus, the responsibility to engage morally persists at every level, requiring explicit ethical reflection at both the meta-level (choosing overall norms and dialogue-types) and the object-level (making specific argumentative moves). This means that argumentation theory must therefore incorporate an applied ethics of normative argument design (Stevens, 2026). This applied ethics should systematically clarify where moral decision-making becomes necessary, how participants should approach these decisions, and what moral factors must be considered in practical argumentation.

Stevens' emphasis on role ethics within argumentation aligns precisely with the earlier critique of dialogue theory's treatment of "flavor." Just as subtle flavors shape the argumentative landscape without explicit shifts between dialogue types, minor role adjustments bear moral consequences. While there is no clear shift from one type of procedure to another, the interlocutor, knowingly or unknowingly, initiates a new role. Each argumentative move implicates the arguer morally, requiring continuous reflection on how these moves influence power dynamics, interpersonal relationships, and participants' epistemic integrity. Moral considerations in argumentation extend far beyond selecting appropriate norm-sets; they pervade every interactional detail, underscoring arguers' responsibility to remain ethically vigilant throughout the argumentative process. Therefore, incorporating moral reasoning explicitly into argumentation theory provides a critical corrective to both single-set and multi-set normative approaches. Stevens (2026) advocates for the exploration of non-Western theories of argumentation as part of an ongoing quest for toolboxes that can aid in understanding argumentative reality. As we will see in the later sections, this exploration is indeed promising and will help us document the discussion of argumentative roles and later show how this role ethics has been incorporated into the discussion of protagonist and antagonist roles in the *Munāẓara* tradition, where even the abandoned notion of flavor can be reconsidered within the framework of role ethics.

#### 4. Muslim approach to dialogue theory<sup>1</sup>

In Section 3, through a moral approach to argumentation, I showed how even slight differences such as flavoring one's speech or a shift in tone have epistemic and practical implications. In this section, I will revisit the *Ādāb al-Baḥṭh wa al-Munāẓara* tradition (for an introduction, see Rahman & Young, 2022; Oruç, 2025), and its approach to different types of dialogues. This section discusses *Munāẓara* as an argumentative tradition and elaborates *munāẓara* as a distinct type of dialogue within the tradition. A brief survey of the secondary literature's attempts to translate the full name of the theory will show that unless *munāẓara* is understood as its own distinct type of dialogue, confusion will arise. This confusion is twofold: First, secondary literature does not consider developments in modern theory. Second, the incommensurability of certain types of dialogue between dialogue theory and the Islamic approach is evident. *Munāẓara* emerges as a type of dialogue that aims for the manifestation of truth, distinct from a persuasion-based dialogue. In this sense, *munāẓara* is closer to an inquiry dialogue. Nevertheless, since there is an initial conflict between the antagonist and the protagonist, *munāẓara* as a type of dialogue differs from an inquiry as well. Moreover, when it comes to the commitments of each party in a *munāẓara* dialogue, we see that the *Munāẓara* tradition diverges from modern theories: while the protagonist's retraction of commitments is not well tolerated, the antagonist is given the freedom to retract their commitments.

While the study of dialogue somewhat faded into oblivion after Aristotle in the "Western" world, this was not the case for the vast Islamic world. As a result, *Munāẓara* developed its own distinct terminology, as a mixture of Aristotelian and Muslim perspectives, leading to the incommensurability of concepts between classical Aristotelian, contemporary Western, and traditional Islamic scholarship. Moreover, *Munāẓara* remains a treasure trove yet to be fully explored, with more than 300 individual works still in manuscript form (Çelik, 2022; Oruç

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<sup>1</sup> While I use the terms "Muslim" and "Islamic", it is important to note that in the Muslim intellectual tradition and in the madrasas, *Munāẓara* is considered a tool science, free from any religious input *per se*. That is, it does not necessarily involve religious problems or solutions, but is context-independent. I use these terms not because its content is "Islamic", but to denote from which civilization it emerged.

et al., 2023c), making it impossible to speak of a "unified," systematic theory or a broader picture such as what we see in contemporary frameworks like dialogue theory, pragma-dialectics, or informal logic.

The absence of a unified theoretical framework for situating *munāẓara* in contemporary scholarship becomes evident in attempts to translate the name of the theory. One way to move forward would be to describe *munāẓara* on its own terms, without offering an English translation. However, to provide access to the tradition for contemporary scholars, we see that the secondary literature offers many diverse interpretations of *munāẓara*. Faytre translates *Ādāb al-Baḥṭh wa al-Munāẓara* as "Applied Ethics of Argumentation and Deliberation" (2018, iv), interpreting *Ādāb* as applied ethics. Faytre understands *al-Baḥṭh* as argumentation, defining the term as "making a claim and supporting it with proofs" (2018, p. 3). As for *munāẓara*, he translates it as deliberation, arguing that:

It is a kind of disputation (*mūbahese*) strictly motivated by the will of discovering or disclosing the truth without any concern about the winner of the debate [...] Yet, in addition to involving also the notion of reciprocity, the term 'deliberation' better encompasses the idea of 'disclosing the truth,' an idea that suggests a tempered, wise, and disinterested behavior from the discussants. In Latin, *deliberare* means 'consider carefully,' which gave in modern English 'deliberation' referring to long and careful consideration or discussion, slow and careful movement or thought (Faytre, 2018, p. 7).

Faytre's translation aims to capture the literal intricacies of the terms *Ādāb*, *Baḥṭh*, and *Munāẓara* without taking into account the technical terminology that has been hitherto developed in contemporary Western scholarship regarding inquiry, deliberation, and related concepts. Walter Edward Young (2015) translates *Baḥṭh* as "dialectical inquiry," and he renders *munāẓara* as "dialectical disputation." His translations cover the technical terminology of the era and, interestingly enough, also align with Lumer's dialectical and epistemological approach to argumentation, outlined in his paper "The disputation—a special type of cooperative argumentative dialogue" (1988). Overall, however, as we will see below, this confusion in the secondary literature is more than justified when one considers lexical and scholarly terminologies together.

I have discussed the secondary literature; now I will return to the primary literature on *munāzara*. It will be seen that while it is theoretically possible to demarcate *munāzara* from *mujādala* (debate), *mukābara*/*munāza'a* (quarrel), *mughālata* (eristics), and *mufākara* (information-seeking), it is not the same when it comes to *baḥth*/*mubāḥatha* (inquiry). *Munāzara* is a special kind of inquiry taking place between two parties. What differentiates it from inquiries mentioned in dialogue theory is the definite protagonist and antagonist roles, with both having varying heavy burdens in the argumentation stage of an inquiry (*bar-i giran-ı mubāḥase*<sup>2</sup>). Scholars of *Munāzara* are quick to differentiate *munāzara* from negatively-charged types of dialogues. The first set of these is *mujādala* (debate<sup>3</sup>) and *munāza'a* (quarrel; sometimes also called *mukābara*, arrogance) (al-Jaunpūrī, 2006). In contrast to a *munāzara*, the goal of each party in a debate is not the manifestation of truth but winning the argument by way of cogently silencing the interlocutor. This cogent silencing takes place by using the commitments of the other party against her. Using the commitments of the other party, however, is not acceptable in a *munāzara* (al-Āmidī, 1900, p. 86). While it is not illegitimate to use the commitments of the other party, the moment one party makes such a move, the type of dialogue shifts from a *munāzara* to a debate (*mujādala*). I speculate that this is because of the idea that truth is independent of individuals, and therefore independent of their commitments, especially from those of the opposing party. This stands in stark contrast to persuasion dialogues we have seen in dialogue theory, as the goal of persuasion dialogue is exactly to employ the commitments of each party.

In quarrels, the goal is not even silencing the opponent. For some scholars (Şācāqlīzāda, 1872; Öztop, 2018), a debate is a subtype of quarrel, whereas others differentiate between the two as distinct dialogue types. One might win an argument without grasping the truth of the matter, yet do so in a completely reasonable and, perhaps, moral

<sup>2</sup> These are the words of Ahmet Cevdet Paşa, a late 19th century scholar (Faytre, 2018, p. 74).

<sup>3</sup> The term *jadal* undergoes significant changes throughout history (see Oruç, 2025). Over the centuries the term is associated with Aristotelian dialectics; the argumentation theory that preceded the emergence of *Munāzara* and any kind of dialogical encounter that does not aim for truth. *Jadal*/*mujadala* might be performed properly or not.

way. Here, one does not exploit illegitimate means, but the dialogue proceeds in their favor without necessarily leading to truth. This would not count as a quarrel, and it is still not a *munāẓara*. An argument can also be won with illegitimate moves such as shifting the burden of proof (usurpation/*ghasb*); insisting on a claim without arguments (subjugation/*tahakkum*); requesting an argument for an already justified claim or denying incontrovertible premises (*mukābara*<sup>4</sup>). For those who equate debate with quarrel, any of these moves turns the *munāẓara* into a quarrel.

We have now seen how *Munāẓara* literature differentiates *munāẓara* from debate and quarrel. The literature also differentiates between *mufākara* (information-seeking) and *munāẓara*. In *munāẓara*, it is expected that there is no asymmetry between arguing parties; they are regarded as equals in terms of position and knowledge. If there is an asymmetry, the dialogue becomes a *mufākara*, corresponding to information-seeking dialogue. It is easy to differentiate these dialogue types, but when it comes to differentiating *munāẓara* and inquiry (*baḥṭh*), things become complicated. Gelenbevī (1934, p. 32) defines *baḥṭh* and *munāẓara* as the exchange of defenses (*mudāfaʿa*) for the manifestation of truth. This definition does not clarify whether *baḥṭh* and *munāẓara* are distinct. In response to this ambiguity, Gelenbevī's commentator, al-Pencweynī, explains that the connective 'and' in "*baḥṭh* and *munāẓara*" serves for explication (Gelenbevī, 1934, p. 32). This interpretation renders Gelenbevī's definition of *munāẓara* as: "Know that *baḥṭh*,—that is, *munāẓara*—is the exchange of defenses for the manifestation of truth." Thus, we learn that in a *munāẓara*, there are two parties who assume distinct roles and need to regulate the burden of proof. From al-Jaunpūrī (2006, p. 12), we learn that "*Baḥṭh* has three meanings":

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<sup>4</sup>al-Qarsī (Öztop, 2018) and Şacāqlīzāda (1872) understand *mukābara* as an illegitimate move leading the discussion into a quarrel. They count a varying number of cases where this move is performed. We will see below that the place of usurpation as an instance of *mukābara* is rejected by Gelenbevī and al-Qarsī. On the other hand, for al-Jurjanī and al-Jaunpūrī (2006) among many others, *mukābara* is another name for quarrel.

1. Predication (*ḥaml*)
2. proving the relationship between the subject and predicate of a proposition with arguments (*istidlāl*), and
3. *munāẓara*.

Al-Kīlānī explains that *baḥṭh* has a customary and technical definition. He cites Avicenna for the technical definition:

‘Dialectical inquiry’ (*baḥṭh*), in customary linguistic usage, is examination and investigation; but in technical usage—according to what the Chief Sheikh [Ibn Sīnā] said—it is establishing the affirmative or negative relation between two things by way of indicant-seeking (*istidlāl*) (translation by Young, 2015, p. 38).

The two things mentioned here are referring to the subject and the predicate in a proposition.

In this vein, Al-Samarqandī defines *munāẓara* as: “*Munāẓara* is rational investigation (*naẓar*) by way of insight (*baṣīra*), from both sides, with regard to the relation between two things, as a means of making clear what is correct (*ṣawāb*)” (translation by Young, 2015, p. 12). This definition aligns with the second sense of *baḥṭh* [rendered by Young as dialectical inquiry]: “establishing the affirmative or negative relation between two things by way of indicant-seeking (*istidlāl*)”. However, in this case, some moves in the *munāẓara* procedure would be omitted (al-Jaunpūrī, 2006, pp. 12-13), such as the antagonist’s right to object without providing an argument for it, by simply stating “Your minor premise needs defense”, or “I don’t accept your major premise.” That is, the antagonist has a right to move without incurring any commitments. This leads al-Jurjanī to diverge from the established definition, proposing to emphasize the real or presumed conflict of opinion during a *munāẓara*. He suggests altering the genus in the definition, from the rational reasoning (*naẓar*) to opposition (*mukhāṣama*): “*Munāẓara* is the opposition between two parties for the manifestation of truth” (al-Jaunpūrī, 2006, pp. 10-15). This definition underscores the protagonist and antagonist positions, the initial conflict of opinions, and accounts for the dialogical encounter between parties, which does not always need to be in the form of arguments.

If rendered in modern dialogue theory, we could say that *munāẓara* is a special type of inquiry, where parties are required to aim for the

manifestation of truth. In this endeavor, parties cannot use commitments of the other party to get concessions from each other. This makes *munāẓara* distinct from a persuasion dialogue, where getting concessions is the norm. *Munāẓara*, as a type of dialogue, involves conflict of opinions between parties; an aspect of inquiry that is left obscure in the modern dialogue theory. Nevertheless, *munāẓara* also differs from an inquiry in that while the protagonist's retraction of commitments is not well-tolerated, the antagonist is regarded to have no *madhab* (sect, ways, and set of norms she commits herself to) as long as she does not derail from the main goal of the encounter: the manifestation of truth (al-Āmidī, 1900, p. 107). This means that, as long as she does not perform illegitimate moves such as a *mukābara* (objecting to incontrovertible premises), asserting a claim without argument, etc., the antagonist can do whatever she wants, including retracting commitments. Moreover, as we have seen above, if the protagonist builds upon the commitments of the antagonist, she is no longer in a *munāẓara* but in a debate. Therefore, the antagonist's retraction or adherence to a set of commitments is not an issue for the protagonist either.

We have seen that it is impossible to confine *munāẓara* into any of the dialogue types mentioned in the modern dialogue theory. Specifically, it is neither a persuasion nor an inquiry type of dialogue. Moreover, translating the term *munāẓara* is not helpful either. On the face of these difficulties, it is better to keep the term *munāẓara* as it is and define *munāẓara* as its own dialogue type, where parties aim for the manifestation of truth, in which, for the antagonist, a retraction of commitments is not problematic and, for the protagonist, basing arguments on the commitments of the antagonist is a shift to a different kind of dialogue. This brief exploration of *munāẓara* as a dialogue type has its own benefits, and as a truth-seeking dialogue type, it involves peculiarities in terms of commitments and how it has been divided between arguing roles.

## 5. What does it mean to be a protagonist and antagonist?

In this section, I will discuss how the *Munāẓara* tradition approaches *munāẓara*. It will help us clarify how the manifestation of truth—the individual goal of arguers as well as the institutional goal of *munāẓara*—is understood; how the roles of antagonist and protagonist are debated; and what it means to make an argumentative move that

constitutes a turn by either party during the discussion. The discussion will revolve around the institutional goal of *munāzara* (the manifestation of truth), which ideally should also be the individual goal of arguers. This institutional/individual goal leads to a procedure where both the antagonist and the protagonist have diverging duties (*wazā'if*) (Şācāqlīzāda, 1872). In this procedure, the antagonist and protagonist take turns. Despite this minute procedure based on the regulation of the burden of proof, we will see that there is a great deal of room for each party to "play" around. It is in this ethical playground that parties need to design their moves: What does it mean to be a protagonist? What does it mean to be an antagonist? How should one perform their duties in a way that contributes to the manifestation of truth? This section will establish that, as argumentative roles of antagonist and protagonist are understood through both rights and obligations, despite a strict turn-taking procedure, there are no argumentative norms that strictly define what constitutes a protagonist and antagonist. The parties need to design their own understanding of what counts as an argumentative role or move.

In the *Munāzara* tradition, the protagonist is the one who appoints herself to argue for a claim, while the antagonist appoints herself to question or outright reject the claim (al-Jaupūrī, 2006). They appoint themselves to the related rights and duties that come with this self-appointment. Parties take turns in this fashion, regulating the burden of proof. The problem, however, emerges in understanding what constitutes their respective roles and what a turn is. Imagine that in the argumentation stage of a *munāzara*, the protagonist makes a claim—should the antagonist directly intervene, or should she wait for the protagonist to make an argument for her own claim? Or imagine that the protagonist has made a claim and then presents an argument for it—should the antagonist wait for the protagonist to offer further arguments for its premises? From a dialectical, logical, or rhetorical point of view, there are no rules that govern which action should be taken. Whichever action the protagonist or the antagonist takes can be considered part of their respective roles, and part of the notion of a turn. That is to say, there is leeway to make choices at each juncture of the interaction. This has led to disagreements over the centuries about what constitutes a turn in the tradition and what the associated argumentative duties are.

The discussion on argumentative turns takes place within the terms of *tawjīh* (relevance) and *maqbul* (admissible). Relevance is said to be the main duty of each party, such that *munāzara* is also called *ṣināʿat al-tawjīh* (roughly, the art of relevance) (Gelenbevī, 1934). Relevance refers to moves made by either party that fit the specific juncture of the encounter. Any move that changes the topic or otherwise deviates constitutes a breach of duty and a derailment from the goal of *munāzara*, i.e., the manifestation of truth. However, as we have seen above and will now examine further, there are moves that are relevant, yet their admissibility is questioned. The protagonist has the right to offer arguments for her claim. If the claim is not supported by arguments, this constitutes a breach in her duty, and she is said to commit *taḥakkum* (subjugation). Similarly, if the antagonist interrupts the protagonist and makes an argument for the negation of the claim, the antagonist is said to commit *ghaṣb* (usurpation). Since it constitutes the duty (comprising rights and obligations) of the protagonist, it is argued that usurpation disrupts the order of debate and is therefore inadmissible (al-Jaupūrī, 2006). While the inadmissibility of usurpation nearly became a consensus view in the tradition, there were influential figures, such as Gelenbevī (1934), who disagreed. Gelenbevī's reasoning is easier to understand from a relevance perspective: a usurpation addresses a not-yet-defended claim or a not-yet-defended premise. It is thereby a relevant move. But is it admissible? If the antagonist acts in accordance with the goal of truth, we can also claim it is admissible. To understand the admissibility of such moves, we need to discuss what the protagonist and antagonist roles entail.

*Wazāʾif*, translatable as duties, comprise both obligations and rights. Therefore, since the protagonist commits herself to a claim, and the antagonist commits to its doubt/negation, there is no debate that it is the obligation of the protagonist to argue for her claim, and it is the obligation of the antagonist to respond to it. The debate is on what rights are associated with these obligations. When a claim is made but not yet substantiated by the protagonist, does the antagonist have the right to offer an argument to negate the claim? Main figures in the tradition seem to hold that the protagonist not only has this duty but also priority in fulfilling it. This is understandable, since it is the protagonist who has appointed herself to argue for a claim. The protagonist should make

the first move in this situation. This, I speculate, is a balancing act addressing the power imbalance that comes with the protagonist and antagonist roles. Remember that the antagonist has the right to retract commitments, while any retraction by the protagonist harms her: if she retracts her claim, the debate is over; if she retracts an argument, she must provide a new one; if she retracts a premise, the argument for the claim loses force. To balance this perceived vulnerability of the protagonist, I suspect that priority is given to her whenever a claim needs to be argued.

Gelenbevī (1934) disagrees. Usurpation, he argues, would be an admissible act as long as it serves the purpose of the dialogue. He denies that the protagonist has any priority whatsoever. The concern should be with truth. In response to this argument, we do not witness a strong counterargument, other than the concern that in such a case, the smooth transition of moves is at risk. When the antagonist performs a usurpation, the protagonist might follow suit, resulting in a proliferation of unsubstantiated claims (al-Āmidī, 1900). For Gelenbevī (1934, pp. 54–60), this is of no concern. He even argues that one can make a counterargument or claim that the protagonist's possible argument is fallacious before the argument is even presented. That is to say, he deems it admissible to project arguments onto the other party. In doing so, he maintains that for the manifestation of truth, the antagonist does not need to wait for the protagonist. Many other figures in the tradition argue the opposite: since it is the right of the protagonist to prove her claim, the antagonist should work within that priority (al-Āmidī, 1900, p. 58). For these scholars, committing usurpation—since it shifts the right to and burden of proof—turns the discussion into a debate, if not a quarrel.

This section has shown that the roles of the protagonist and the antagonist in the tradition do not involve perfectly clear dialectical, logical, and rhetorical norms that dictate what constitutes a role or what constitutes a move in sequence. In turn, parties need to determine at the specific juncture of the encounter what it means to be a protagonist and what it means to be an antagonist. This argument-role ethics becomes inevitable in a procedure such as *munāẓara*, where every turn is minutely regulated, and parties are given both obligations and rights. First, parties must ensure that they are still within the *munāẓara* dialogue by not derailing from the institutional/individual goal of the encounter. They must also ensure that they do not exploit the commitments of the

other party or commit other inadmissible moves such as usurpation, which would turn the encounter into a debate or even a quarrel. We see that object-level and meta-level role ethics become unavoidable for the parties. The following section will detail a debate in the Munāzara tradition that not only discusses role ethics but also elaborates on role-making and shifting.

## **6. Prescribed sequences and argumentative role ethics in munāzara**

In the previous section, we saw how the argumentative roles of the protagonist and antagonist come with inevitable argument-design ethics, despite the strictly regimented move-based procedure of munāzara. This section will reveal another point of contention: How should the antagonist sequence her moves, and for what reasons? The sequence of moves will be based on both relevant and admissible moves. This debate aimed to answer how the antagonist should act to better serve the goal of munāzara. We will first discuss what relevant and admissible moves are, and then how the combination of these moves leads to three documented sequence prescriptions. We will see that in this debate, the notion of flavor emerges in one of the sequence prescriptions, allowing us to revisit the notion of flavor within the framework of role-design.

So far, we have focused on how scholars view argumentative roles when it comes to who has what rights and obligations in a given juncture of an encounter. The question of which party receives priority has led to two distinct approaches: While some held that the protagonist should be given priority, others disagreed. In this section, we will focus on another debate, specifically examining the antagonist's moves and how she should respond when the protagonist has presented her argument and established her premises. We see that in this debate, the issue of each party's rights and obligations will again serve as the point of departure. Some argued that since it is the right of the protagonist to make arguments, the antagonist should avoid shifting the burden of proof as much as possible. Moreover, they argued that the antagonist should act as an information-seeker who actively helps the protagonist to make her arguments. The other side, which rejects priority for the protagonist, has diverged into two camps: those who advocate epistemic concerns over communicative or performative ones, and those

who value performative efficiency for the antagonist. Taking the suggestion that one should act as an information seeker, we might characterize the two camps as those who flavor their argument roles with refutational inquiry and those who flavor their roles with persuasive dialogue.

Leaving aside figures such as Gelenbevī, it seems that the remaining available literature on Munāẓara holds that a munāẓara should start with a claim made by the protagonist, followed by an argument and its premises. The idea that the protagonist should also be given priority to argue for the individual premises of her argument (Güney, 2010) does not stick in later scholarship. After the argument is laid down by the protagonist, there are three relevant and admissible moves for the antagonist: objection (*man*'), refutation (*naqd*), and counterargument (*mu'āraḍa*). We have dealt with these types of moves and the debate surrounding their sequencing extensively (Oruç et al., 2023a, 2023b). Here, my focus will be on the justifications offered for a sequence, so a brief summary of critical moves and different sequence prescriptions will suffice.

The objection focuses on the premises, with its illocutionary power being the request for defense from the protagonist. Refutation examines the argument as a whole, checking for any fallacies and inconsistencies between the protagonist's claim and the argument provided for it. Finally, the counterargument targets the claim (P) itself, and by presenting an argument that negates the claim (not P) directly or indirectly, the antagonist demonstrates that there are admissible counterarguments to be made, requiring the protagonist to address them. It is also important to discuss the burden of proof and turn-taking regulation: an objection does not involve shifting the burden of proof; in fact, it allows the protagonist to detail their case more. Refutation is tricky as it must rest on an argument (witness, *shāhid*) that highlights the inconsistency/fallacy in the protagonist's argument. Faced with a refutation, the protagonist has two options: she might simply come up with a new argument for the same claim, continuing the role of the protagonist. Alternatively, the protagonist might object to the antagonist's refutation, thereby assuming the role of the antagonist. Thus, refutation still offers the protagonist a chance to continue their role. It is for the protagonist to make the choice. A counterargument, on the other hand, shifts the burden of proof completely, and the initial protagonist now has no other option but to

respond as the new antagonist. These details are crucial in terms of role-taking and enabling the other party to assume a role, as we will see below.

Given these relevant and admissible moves, we encounter three sequence prescriptions in the literature:

1. Objection → Refutation → Counterargument<sup>5</sup>
2. Refutation → Objection → Counterargument<sup>6</sup>
3. Objection → Counterargument → Refutation<sup>7</sup>

Sequence 1 is favoured because an objection carries the weakest illocutionary force, requiring only the defense of a premise without indicating a deficiency in the argument (as with refutation) or threatening the claim (as with counter-argument). Moreover, the objection does not shift the burden of proof (al-Jaunpūrī, 2006, p. 76). Al-Jaunpūrī further explains that, according to al-Jurjānī, the primary duty of the antagonist is “to question and seek information (*istisfar*)” (2006, p. 76), rather than to refute or counterargue against the protagonist’s argument. This justification for the sequence does not alter the overall character of the dialogue but lends it an information-seeking flavor. The antagonist aims to assist the protagonist by refraining from assuming the burden of proof as much as possible, adopting the role of an information-seeker, and consciously creating an illusion of asymmetry between the parties.

The introduction of the information-seeking type of dialogue into a *munāẓara*, thus the prescription to act as an information-seeker, reminds us of the concept of flavor. The antagonist is recommended to make the moves in a certain sequence, and this is considered the best option for both parties to manifest the truth. Notice that the antagonist is free to choose any of the relevant and admissible moves. We have seen how the determination of those moves required an investigation into what it means to be an antagonist and a protagonist. In the three prescribed sequences, the investigation deepens. If sequence 1 is prescribed because it gives the encounter an information-seeking dialogue flavor, what might the two other sequence prescriptions mean? Which procedural

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<sup>5</sup> Prescribed by Jurjānī (al-Jaunpūrī, 2006, pp. 76-77)

<sup>6</sup> Prescribed by Mullā Ḥanafī (Mullā Ḥanafī, 2014, pp. 40-41)

<sup>7</sup> Prescribed by Ṣācāqlīzāda (al-Āmidī, 1900, p. 60)

move-design, based on a certain understanding of the roles of the protagonist and the antagonist, leads to which kind of flavoring?

Sequence 2 is similar to Sequence 1 but with a crucial distinction between the first and second moves. When all three moves are available, Sequence 1 intentionally begins with an objection, unlike Sequence 2. Sequence 2 places greater emphasis on argumentation, prescribing refutation as the first move and giving the dialogue an *elenchus* flavor, a subtype of inquiry (translated as refutation by Walton & Krabbe, 1995, p. 85). The emphasis on the validity of argument and the urgency to perform an *elenchus* shows that those who favor the Sequence 2 get us closer to an inquiry type of dialogue where epistemic concerns rule over communicative ones. Yet, here as well, the counterargument does not come first. Moreover, in response to a refutation, the protagonist has options: She can either question the fallacy/inconsistency charge, thereby giving up the protagonist role, or she can come up with a new argument for her claim. When the refutation is performed, the burden of proof stays in a limbo, the antagonist shows their willingness to assume it, and the protagonist is free to keep it or give it away. In this sequence, we get close to an inquiry in which sticking to protagonist and antagonist roles is a secondary concern as long as the moves contribute to a stricter epistemic benefit for both parties.

Sequence 3, like Sequence 1, starts with an objection but differs by placing the counterargument second. It is also where the idea of performing the role of antagonist in the least demanding way is introduced (al-Āmidī, 1900, pp. 60-61). The objection here is chosen not to open a communicative space; the antagonist is not particularly interested in offering a space for the protagonist to move. The antagonist is not interested in taking the role of an information-seeker or an ardent refutational-inquirer. The first move is objection because it is the least demanding move, and the second move in the sequence is a counterargument. The justification is that presenting a counterargument immediately after an objection fulfills the real goal of the antagonist, which is disproving the claim. If an objection were followed by a refutation, as in Sequence 1, the role of the antagonist would not be fully realized efficiently, as refuting an argument does not disprove the claim itself. Moreover, a refutation requires demonstrating the fallacy or inconsistency in the protagonist's argument. The refutation can be challenged by the protagonist, and now the task of the antagonist is to stay strong

in defending her fallacy/inconsistency charge. Importantly, even if the refutation succeeds, the protagonist can come up with a new argument, which means that the antagonist has tasked herself with a lot of unfruitful labor. Sequence 3 positions the antagonist role primarily to reject the claim, transforming the dispute into a mixed one with two claims under debate and two perspectives in need of persuasion from the outset. Here, we get closer to a persuasion dialogue, not in terms of management of commitments, but through the attitude of arguing parties, in which both the protagonist and antagonist have their own overarching arguments towards the claim.

While these are the three prescribed move-sequences, we can imagine different sequences. Notice that, apart from Gelenbevī—even those who do not hold any priority for the protagonist—do not prescribe a sequence where the first move is the counterargument. With the existing, so far uncovered, primary literature on *munāẓara*, we do not encounter a sequence prescription beginning with counterargument, continuing with refutation, and ending with an objection. While this sequence would still be considered a *munāẓara* dialogue, as a polar opposite to sequence 1, it would be one in which the antagonist finds every possible means to disagree and increase their overall speech time. Such a sequence would be closer to a debate<sup>8</sup>.

As we have seen above, even when playing the role of an arduous inquirer, they start with a refutation which allows the protagonist to make a choice: Do I want to come up with a new argument for my claim, or should I allow the antagonist to make her case of fallacy/inconsistency? I speculate that it relates to the idea that, as much as any action in our world, arguing relates to what kind of person we want and aspire to be. Being a hasty arguer who attaches too much to their own ideas was probably not in the book of exemplars. Playing the roles of protagonist and antagonist, adding onto specific flavors, is part of training to

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<sup>8</sup> I thank the anonymous reviewer for drawing my attention to Basil Hatim's analysis of Arabic rhetorical practice. Hatim (1990) uses "counter-argumentative" to describe the style of first presenting the other side's position and then rejecting it, a pattern associated with *jadāl/mujādala* (debate) in the *Naqd*, a literary/rhetorical text from the 9th century. Hatim argues that while this style is prevalent in languages such as English, it is not preferred by modern Arabic users, even though the rhetorical tradition, as in the *Naqd*, presents it as the best way to argue.

be a better person; it is part of self-transformation (Sadek, 2023). Sequence prescriptions reveal much: Even when acting cooperatively with relevant and admissible moves, the manner of cooperation is critical. Should we act as an information-seeker, a truth-loving inquirer, a passionate persuader, or a debater determined to take up speech-time as much as possible? Moreover, the roles we assume are relational, affecting not just ourselves. Through our role-play, we make others assume certain roles. It is a way to show which dispositions we intend to act on, and which dispositions we expect from the other party (Tindale, 2021). Why we engage in self-transformation through self-work, whether it changes from culture to culture, however, requires its own study.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper set out to articulate how the Munāẓara tradition contributes a distinct theoretical model to argumentation studies by introducing an ethically charged conception of argumentative roles. Drawing on dialogue theory and role ethics, it demonstrated that the munāẓara framework cannot be reduced to persuasion, inquiry, or any of the established dialogue types. Instead, it presents a type of dialogue where the manifestation of truth replaces persuasion or proof as the guiding goal, and where the protagonist and antagonist negotiate their roles. By bringing the insights of Stevens' role ethics into the conversation with the procedural logic of Ādāb al-Baḥṭh wa al-Munāẓara, the paper established that ethical decision-making is structurally embedded in the very form of argumentation. Even when roles and sequences appear formally defined, arguers must continually determine how to perform their duties and exercise their rights. This procedural indeterminacy transforms argumentation from a rule-governed exchange into an ethical practice of role design. The paper therefore achieves two things simultaneously: it expands the typology of dialogue by identifying munāẓara as its own category, and it reframes argumentation theory itself as an ethical endeavor inseparable from the choices arguers make at every turn.

The goal of this paper is to establish Munāẓara as a tradition worthy of systematic study both in its own right and as a productive point of comparison with modern dialogue theory. Indeed, munāẓara enriches our understanding of argumentative interactions by highlighting the inevitable negotiation of argumentative roles, and it underscores the need for normative theories to address explicitly both rights and obligations

of participants. This paper has traced the limitations of existing models of argumentation and the alternatives they propose. On one side, pragma-dialectics upholds a single normative standard; on the other, dialogue theory distributes norms across multiple dialogue types. Both approaches assume that, once a framework is chosen, the responsibilities of arguers are sufficiently determined. Stevens (2026) has shown why this assumption is flawed: even within established procedures, arguers face continual moral choices in how they perform their roles, and these choices can carry practical and epistemic consequences. Argumentation is never exhausted by procedural clarity. Each move implicates arguers in moral reasoning about how they ought to engage with one another.

Building on Stevens' work, I have argued that role ethics in argumentation is not just necessary but inevitable. Dialogue theory, when seen through the lens of roles, already hints at this: roles are not mechanical slots into which arguers fit, but dynamic positions that must be shaped in interaction. The Munāẓara tradition makes this explicit. Even with detailed prescriptions for the protagonist and the antagonist, centuries of debate questioned what exactly these roles entail—whether the antagonist should object, refute, or counter-argue first, whether the protagonist has priority in defending her claim, and what counts as admissible intervention. These disputes show that interlocutors must actively design their roles at every juncture, and that this design unavoidably carries ethical weight. To take up a role is to accept responsibility for how one's actions will bind, release, or redirect the obligations of both parties.

This paper began by situating itself in the long-standing debate between pragma-dialectics and dialogue theory, emphasizing how both traditions have struggled to account for the moral dimensions of argumentative behavior. This theoretical groundwork established the problem that procedural frameworks, whether single-norm or multi-norm, cannot capture the ethical choices embedded in real argumentative exchanges. From there, the discussion of *dialogue types, shifts, and flavors* showed that even Walton and Krabbe's pluralistic model, while more flexible, abandoned the concept of "flavor" precisely because it complicated the project of fallacy-classification. This historical omission opened the conceptual space for reintroducing flavor as *role-making*, connecting the procedural to the ethical.

Subsequent sections (Sections 3-5) turned to the Munāẓara tradition itself, analyzing its internal differentiation from related Islamic dialogue types such as *mujādala*, *mufākara*, and *mukābara*. These analyses demonstrated how Munāẓara occupies a middle ground between inquiry and persuasion: it begins with conflict but aims for truth rather than victory. The discussion of the *protagonist* and *antagonist* roles then revealed that, despite detailed prescriptions, interlocutors still negotiate their duties and rights in practice. This became the empirical basis for the claim that ethical decision-making is not external to procedure but built into it. Finally, Section 6, on prescribed sequences and argumentative role ethics made this procedural-ethical relation explicit. By examining classical disagreements over sequencing, relevance, and admissibility, this paper has shown that even within strict formal constraints, the tone, timing, and composition of each move can reshape the dialogue's moral character. The appearance of "flavor" in these prescriptions illustrated how arguers consciously modulate their roles—as information-seekers, refutational inquirers, or persuasive antagonists—demonstrating that moral agency and procedural form are inseparable.

It is now possible to see why munāẓara must be treated as its own dialogue type rather than as a variant of persuasion or inquiry. Persuasion dialogues rely on the exchange of concessions and retractions of commitments, whereas in munāẓara the use of an opponent's commitments is not tolerated, and any such use turns the dialogue into a *mujādala* (debate). Inquiry dialogues, on the other hand, begin from an open problem and proceed cumulatively toward a proof, presupposing that both parties share ignorance at the outset. Munāẓara begins instead from a defined conflict of opinions between a protagonist and an antagonist, both of whom are expected to act within a regulated structure. The goal is not to accumulate verified propositions or to persuade the other party but to manifest the truth through the regulated exchange of arguments and objections. The dialogue remains distinct because its rules on commitment, sequencing, and burden of proof reorganize the very logic of participation: what counts as an admissible move, who carries argumentative rights/obligations, and how procedural order is maintained. This procedural configuration gives munāẓara its theoretical autonomy within dialogue typology, and it is within this configuration that the ethical dimension of argumentative role-making becomes inevitable.

Munāzara also demonstrates this inevitability through its asymmetrical treatment of commitments. The protagonist is bound by her assertions, and any retraction comes at a cost, while the antagonist is free to retract commitments as long as the overarching aim of truth is preserved. This structural imbalance itself requires ethical negotiation, as each choice about sequencing or burden of proof recalibrates the meaning of the dialogue. Whether flavored as information-seeking, inquiry, or persuasion, every enactment of protagonist or antagonist roles embodies a moral decision about how to pursue truth together. However, this paper represents only a preliminary exploration; further in-depth analyses of Munāzara are required. A systematic and comprehensive classification of the different dialogue types outlined in the tradition—particularly inquiry, quarrel, and debate—is necessary to fully appreciate its theoretical depth. Examining these distinctions closely would provide greater clarity regarding how munāzara manages burdens of proof, regulates argumentative commitments, and distinguishes itself from related dialogue types. Such detailed mapping is crucial for positioning munāzara appropriately within broader comparative studies in argumentation theory. Future research should pay particular attention to how Munāzara handles these comparative distinctions, especially in relation to modern inquiry dialogues, where the cumulative nature of evidence gathering and burden distribution remains complex and underexplored.

While this paper has emphasized the antagonist's moves and their ethical dimensions, equal scrutiny of the protagonist's argumentative strategies and associated role-design decisions is essential. Focusing on the protagonist would yield a more balanced understanding of the ethical complexity and procedural openness of munāzara dialogues. Such studies could also clarify whether existing theories, such as pragmatism and dialogue theory, might overlook crucial nuances by potentially privileging rules-based analyses that emphasize obligations at the expense of explicitly addressing arguers' rights. I speculate that while these modern theories may implicitly acknowledge rights, their explicit integration into normative frameworks could significantly enhance our comprehension of argumentative roles.

This paper took the concept of flavors as a case in point, but further studies on this topic might lead to more empirical clarity. Apart from

procedural aspects, stylistic preferences—particularly tonal and affective—are likely to influence how roles are inhabited and recognized. We can imagine a *munāẓara* where the antagonist opens with an objection framed in an overtly adversarial tone: “How did you come up with this bullshit (premise X or Y)?” In contrast, a protagonist may begin in a seemingly cooperative register—“Can you help me clarify your premise X?”—yet deliver it with sarcasm or veiled condescension. These tonal decisions shape the procedural meaning of each move, inflecting the dialogical frame with additional interpretive layers of ethics. Studying such variations in actual recorded dialogues would allow scholars to more clearly trace how tone, irony, and cooperative posture intersect with the logic of argumentative sequences.

The roles we assume in argumentative interactions are inherently relational, extending their influence beyond our own performance and shaping the roles others adopt. Our choice of roles signals the dispositions we intend to embody and the dispositions we implicitly or explicitly demand from interlocutors. Recognizing this relationality introduces a deeper ethical consideration: engaging in argumentative practices becomes a means of self-design through deliberate self-work. Why we undertake this form of ethical self-development and how/whether the motivations behind such transformations vary across cultural/civilizational contexts, however, remains open to further investigation.

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