

# Civility: One or Many? Introducing “Argumentative Civility”

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**Abstract:** This project develops a novel framework of “argumentative civility” by analyzing political argumentation's nature and challenges. It distinguishes political disagreements from other domains, focusing on civility's dual role as both a facilitative and potentially oppressive tool. Key inquiries include: Who defines civility? Can it foster engagement without silencing dissent? The analysis integrates Western virtue argumentation theory with Islamic traditions of *Munāzara* and *Adab al-Jadal* to build a cross-cultural model for civil discourse. Ultimately, this research aims to establish argumentative civility as a means of fostering peaceful coexistence and socio-political transformation through reasoned, inclusive debate across cultural boundaries.

**Resume:** Ce projet développe un cadre novateur de «civilité argumentative» en analysant la nature et les enjeux de l'argumentation politique. Il distingue les désaccords politiques des autres domaines, en mettant l'accent sur le double rôle de la civilité, à la fois facilitateur et potentiellement oppressif. Les questions clés sont : qui définit la civilité? Peut-elle favoriser l'engagement sans étouffer la dissidence? L'analyse intègre la théorie occidentale de l'argumentation fondée sur la vertu aux traditions islamiques de la *Munāzara* et d'*Adab al-Jadal* afin de construire un modèle interculturel de discours civilisé. En fin de compte, cette recherche vise à établir la civilité argumentative comme un moyen de favoriser la coexistence pacifique et la transformation sociopolitique par un débat raisonné et inclusif au-delà des frontières culturelles.

**Keywords:** *Adab al-Jadal*, argumentative civility, civility, equal political dignity, *Munāzara*, political argumentation, the minimum principle of argumentation, virtue argumentation

## 1. Introduction: Why civility?

How should we manage disagreements in political argumentation, especially when those disagreements reflect deep and persistent divides? Political argumentation, unlike other domains of discourse, is primarily interest-driven rather than truth-oriented. This fundamental characteristic makes legitimate dissensus not only inevitable but also central to its nature (Kock 2017 and Hassan 2024). Yet, when disagreements escalate into deep disagreements—where parties lack shared norms for evaluating evidence or resolving disputes—how can we foster engagement without descending into coercion or force?

This project seeks to answer these questions by reimagining civility as a cluster of argumentative virtues. Civility, as often understood, is essential for peaceful coexistence, but it can also be misused. Who determines what counts as “civil”? Can civility, when defined by those in power, serve as a discursive tool to suppress legitimate dissent? If so, how can we ensure that civility facilitates engagement rather than stifles it? By addressing these questions, this research proposes a novel framework: argumentative civility.

Unlike traditional notions of civility, which risk privileging those already served by the status quo, argumentative civility emphasizes the virtues of a willingness to make reasons accessible to others and to listen to their arguments with a fair-minded attitude. This approach acknowledges that disagreement is not only inevitable in political argumentation but also desirable, as it reflects the diversity of interests and values in any society. However, disagreement alone is insufficient. We must ask: what argumentative practices best allow us to navigate these differences and make the most of them?<sup>1</sup>

Another central concern of this project is the cross-cultural dimension of political argumentation. What happens when the very

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<sup>1</sup> The meaning, scope, and purpose of *argumentative civility* will become clearer as the paper unfolds. However, it is worth briefly distinguishing it from *civil argumentation*. While civil argumentation emphasizes respectful tone and demeanor during disagreement, argumentative civility centers on the argumentative virtues necessary to sustain peaceful discourse and accommodate socio-political change. Thus, civil argumentation can be part of argumentative civility. However, argumentative civility cannot be reduced to respectful argumentation, although it does not exclude it. What matters most for argumentative civility is the duty to provide reasons for claims that have public ramifications.

basis of argumentation—what counts as evidence, what strategies are deemed appropriate—differs across cultures? Can civility accommodate such differences, or must it be entirely culture-dependent? This research argues that a robust account of argumentative civility must transcend cultural boundaries. By integrating insights from Western traditions with perspectives from Islamic thought, this project develops a more inclusive framework capable of fostering constructive engagement across cultural divides.

This project is divided into six sections. In section two, the nature of political argumentation is discussed. In section three, the controversial nature of civility is explained. In section four, the preconditions of argumentative civility are elaborated. In section five, further conditions for argumentative civility are studied. Section six examines the relevancy of virtue argumentation theory to argumentative civility. In section seven, the relevance of the Islamic argumentation tradition to argumentative civility is discussed.

Together, these sections make the case for civility as a cluster of argumentative virtues, where discussions for peaceful socio-political change become possible. In other words, this project aims to conceptualize a type of civility embodied by virtuous arguers who can advocate for socio-political change peacefully. What kind of political creature must we be to argue for radical change peacefully? This project aims to identify the argumentative virtues necessary to become that kind of political actor, drawing from Western accounts of virtue argumentation and the virtues discussed in the Islamic traditions of *Munāzara* and *Adab al-Jadal* literature.

## 2. Political argumentation

In this project, by argumentative civility, I mean a framework that, at a minimum, requires making one's reasons available—and, ideally, accessible and persuasive—to opponents on matters of public concern. Civility, as understood here, operates primarily within the domain of politics. In this section, I will briefly outline the features of political argumentation. These explanations will help us understand both the importance and the limitations of civility.

One of the most apparent features of politics is its inherently competitive nature. Politics is a domain of rivalry. As Harold Lasswell

famously defined it, politics is about “who gets what, when, and how” (1935). Political argumentation, therefore, involves persuading others about who should receive what resources, when, and how. The distribution of resources is central to politics, and justifying that distribution lies at the heart of political argumentation. What emerges, then, is the prominence of interests rather than the primacy of truth in political discourse. Here, interests are not necessarily material interests; they include anything that members of a society find valuable.<sup>2</sup>

Political argumentation occupies a unique position in the broader spectrum of discourse, as it deals primarily with issues of interest rather than questions of truth. This focus makes legitimate dissensus—acceptance of ongoing disagreement—a defining feature of political argumentation (Kock 2017). Unlike scientific or philosophical debates, political disagreements lack universally accepted methods for resolution due to divergent interests, priorities, and power dynamics. The stakes and emotional intensity inherent in political discourse often give rise to disagreements or even deep disagreements. Political arguments typically revolve around proposals with practical consequences for public life. Disagreements about these proposals are inevitable because they reflect conflicting interests, making legitimate dissensus an integral section of political argumentation. Proposals often benefit different groups in different ways, inherently leading to disputes (Hassan 2024).

A defining characteristic of political argumentation is its public nature. Neta Crawford identifies four ideal categories of political arguments: practical or instrumental, ethical, scientific, and identity-based (2004, p. 23). These arguments take on a political dimension when they intersect with public concerns. For example, a scientific debate on global warming becomes political when it influences economic policymaking, such as the introduction of a carbon tax. Policies of this nature directly impact the public, turning private disagreements into communal debates. In such contexts, intensifying

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<sup>2</sup> David Easton’s (1953) well-known definition of politics as the “authoritative allocation of values for a society” (p.129) aligns with this project, because values—material or otherwise—are legitimate subjects of dissensus.

disagreements can escalate dissensus, potentially leading to polarization and political extremism (Hassan 2024).

Hansen and Hassan (2024) define political argumentation as “a sequence of speech acts [that] constitutes political argumentation if, when implemented, [they] empirically affect the public, and normatively, the effects of good political argumentation should be positive, i.e., should serve the public good” (p. 330). Political argumentation, therefore, focuses on proposals that shape public life rather than private matters. These proposals are inherently practical, representing reasoned positions on how to achieve societal objectives. Their primary purpose is to influence public well-being, either by advancing or undermining collective interests. These interests encompass not only tangible resources but also intangible values, such as human dignity, the rule of law, and societal respect (Hansen and Hassan 2024).

A significant challenge in political argumentation is the lack of consensus on what constitutes valid evidence. Groups within a single nation—and even more so across cultures—often differ in their understanding of evidence, experts, and procedures for resolving disputes. These disagreements can escalate into deep disagreements, where parties lack shared norms for argumentation, making resolution exceedingly difficult. Such dynamics underscore the need for a framework that encourages productive engagement while respecting differences—a goal addressed in this research through the concept of argumentative civility.

From the discussion above, we can identify three features of political argumentation relevant to argumentative civility. First, the primary aim of politics is to maximize one’s interests. Second, these interests inevitably affect others because politics operates in the public sphere, not the private domain. Third, the most effective way to promote one’s interests is through political argumentation, persuading others of the legitimacy of your position and encouraging them to join you to strengthen your bargaining power. It is in one’s self-interest to achieve and secure these goals through argumentation rather than resorting to costly and harmful means such as violence. Replacing coercion with persuasion in political argumentation is connected to a central concept which is one of the main preconditions of civility: equal political dignity (see section four).

Before delving into my account of civility, let us take a deeper look at the literature on civility.

### **3. Making sense of civility**

If it is a political fact that our interests are prone to conflict and that we are competitive beings, then civility is what separates violent methods of competition from peaceful ones. Achieving peaceful competition is not easy. History offers few examples of such achievement. Even though some of us enjoy peace today, it is likely that our ancestors engaged in violence. Unfortunately, violent competition is not just a historical fact—it remains a reality, especially at the international level.

Civility does not equate to peace. Peace is a necessary condition for civility, but it is not a sufficient one. In this part of our journey toward conceptualizing civility as a cluster of argumentative virtues, we will explore various definitions of civility. We begin with these definitions, followed by an analysis of their limitations and critiques, and conclude by examining the epistemic and communicative virtues of civility. Finally, we will discuss the aim and purpose of argumentative civility.

Cheshire Calhoun is an important voice in the civility debate. She writes: “Civility always involves a display of respect, tolerance, or considerateness” (2000 p. 259). But what do respect, tolerance, or considerateness mean? She elaborates: “I have in mind acts that the target of civility might reasonably interpret as making it clear that I recognize some morally considerable fact about her that makes her worth treating with respect, considerateness, and tolerance” (Calhoun 2000, p. 259). The moral fact she refers to aligns with the principle of equal political dignity mentioned in the previous section, which will be discussed in detail in the next section. However, equating civility to respectful behaviors has its limitations, especially because disagreements in political argumentation can often become heated. Moreover, civility should also guide how we speak, not just how we behave. This project aims to enrich the debate on civility by connecting it to argumentation.

Teresa Bejan offers another significant perspective. In her book *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration* (2017), she

provides an in-depth analysis of civility. She defines “mere civility” as “the minimum degree of courtesy required in social situations, [...] a minimal conformity to norms of respectful behavior and decorum expected of all members of a tolerant society as such” (Bejan 2017, p. 9). The concept of “mere civility” tolerates disagreement to sustain interaction rather than aiming for harmony or mutual respect. Since arguing—sometimes passionately—is an unavoidable aspect of political argumentation, extending civility into the realm of argumentation is crucial. An important question here is: what sort of persons must we be, argumentatively speaking, to first tolerate disagreement and second, continue the discussion? These questions guide this project, and we will revisit them in later sections.

Christopher Love’s approach to civility highlights its argumentative features. Love equates civility with civil disagreement, describing it as a virtue for managing disputes with clarity and respect: “Civility functions as a virtue, fostering understanding and reconciliation through clarity about beliefs” (2021, p. 639). Civility, therefore, has epistemic benefits beyond maintaining respect. But how can civility encourage understanding and clarity without argumentation? The question then becomes: what forms of argumentation are conducive to civility? By conceptualizing civility as a cluster of argumentative virtues, this project seeks to provide answers.

Can civility be a duty rather than merely an epistemic or argumentative virtue? Robert Talisse (2021) interprets civility as a duty of democratic citizenship, centered on reciprocity and mutual respect. Does this imply that democracy is a precondition for civility? What about civility in intercultural argumentative activities where members of different communities with different political systems engage in argumentation? In this project, I argue that members of a global community who acknowledge the principle of equal political dignity can engage in argumentation virtuously. However, to achieve this, we must identify the argumentative virtues necessary for this noble goal. With these definitions in mind, let us explore different types of civility. While argumentation may not be directly involved in some accounts of civility, it is central to others. Calhoun distinguishes between polite civility and political civility: “Polite civility governs everyday interactions with courtesy, while political civility ensures constructive discourse in societal debates” (2000, p. 256). Bejan

introduces “mere civility” as minimal decorum, contrasting it with robust civility tied to aspirational ideals and respect (2017, p. 9). Talisse frames civility as civic address, which “demands honest engagement, direct connection, and sincere reasoning” (2021, p. 1158). While these authors acknowledge the argumentative dimension of civility, the specific argumentative virtues necessary for civility as a communicative virtue remain to be fully identified. This project aims to fill that gap.

By now, it should be evident that civility is praiseworthy for various reasons. Calhoun (2000) highlights civility's role in fostering respect and tolerance, facilitating harmonious coexistence. Love (2021) emphasizes its epistemic benefits, arguing that civility promotes clarity and reconciliation through thoughtful dialogue. Talisse (2021) associates civility with democratic resilience, positioning it as a safeguard against polarization. Overall, civility is crucial for maintaining peace while allowing for disagreement. In other words, civility balances freedom of thought and expression with unity and coexistence. What argumentative virtues must we embody to engage in civil argumentation? We will wrestle with questions like this in later sections.

However, the picture is not entirely rosy. Civility has also faced criticism. Historically, civility has been associated with social norms that promote decorum and respect. Critics such as Zamalin (2021) contend that civility can function as an oppressive tool, silencing dissent and privileging dominant voices. According to Zamalin, the emphasis on decorum often delegitimizes emotionally charged arguments, marginalizing those who challenge the status quo. Reiheld (2013) echoes this concern, arguing that civility unfairly favors calm, “rational” discourse while devaluing passionate expressions of injustice.

Bejan (2017) offers a more nuanced perspective by categorizing civility into distinct types: civil silence (suppressing disagreement to maintain order), civil charity (tolerating differences without contempt), and mere civility (allowing robust disagreement while maintaining dialogue). While Bejan's taxonomy highlights the diversity of civility, it still leaves unanswered questions: Can civility foster transformative dialogue, or does it inherently constrain it?

Discussions critiquing civility often center around a perspective termed “pro-status quo civility” (Hassan 2024). In this context, civility is portrayed as “the perfect mask for defending a status quo that works well for elites” but is less favorable for marginalized groups (Zamalin 2021, p. 14). According to this critique, those in power define civility in ways that uphold systems safeguarding their interests. Consequently, the notions of civility and incivility carry significant implications. To be deemed civil is to adhere to the established framework and be recognized as a “good citizen.” In contrast, being uncivil is associated with challenging the system and being labeled a “bad citizen.” Essentially, civility functions as a marker of conformity to societal norms.

The concern arises when civility is equated with being a good citizen who is obedient and refrains from questioning the legitimacy of the system. Those who challenge authority or fail to demonstrate “exemplary public etiquette” are labeled uncivil (Zamalin 2021, p. 8). At its core, this critique argues that civility can function as a tool of oppression (Hassan 2024). When dissatisfied individuals or groups demand significant reforms, they are often accused of incivility, undermining or disqualifying their demands regardless of their validity. Critics argue that this dynamic enables rulers to preserve a society where inequality is normalized and injustice remains unchallenged. By silencing dissent and preemptively dismissing its legitimacy, they reinforce the status quo (Hassan 2024). As Zamalin (2021) notes: “This is how rulers maintain a society in which inequality is the norm and injustice an incontrovertible fact: they silence opposition by disqualifying its legitimacy from the start” (pp. 7–8). From a rhetorical standpoint, branding individuals or groups as uncivil is an exceptionally effective strategy (Hassan 2024). Civility, as a force aligned with the status quo, plays a significant role in determining both what can be expressed in arguments and how it should be conveyed. Essentially, civility enforces norms of “proper” argumentation. To be considered civil in a debate, one “must avoid overly hostile or antagonistic language” (Aikin and Talisse 2019, p. 11). Feminist scholars criticize this concept of civility, arguing that it perpetuates injustice by “unduly favoring the status quo and placing heavy burdens on those who feel most aggrieved” (Aikin and Talisse 2020, p. 15). They argue that certain argumentative strategies—

especially those involving “excitability and emotionality that traditionally have been associated with women” (ibid. p. 15)—are unjustly delegitimized by the expectation of civility.

Radical arguers, who challenge the legitimacy of the status quo, are particularly vulnerable to being labeled as uncivil (Hassan, 2024). Their argumentative style—often perceived as loud, abrasive, or disruptive—becomes an easy target. To counter the pro-status quo notion of civility, the concept of “radical civility” is proposed, which allows extremist arguments to serve as meaningful forces for change (Zamalin, 2021 and Hassan, 2024). Extremist argumentation aims at radical civility because:

[...] Shocking and provoking people—no matter how impolite the words or actions might seem—is necessary to wake the majority of people from their moral slumber. Disobeying unjust laws and taking disruptive action puts pressure on the levers of political, cultural, social, and economic power, and that pressure is what moves ruling elites to take notice and come to the negotiating table (Zamalin 2021, p. 9).

Criticism of civility as a pro-status quo force gains traction when considering synonyms like “comity, urbanity, and complaisance” (Reiheld 2013, p. 70). Complaisance, in particular, is problematic as it inherently supports and perpetuates the status quo. If civility is equated with complaisance, those oppressed by the current system have no choice but to be deemed uncivil when rejecting complacency. This label undermines the legitimacy of their argumentative approach. Additionally, as inherently argumentative beings, we often evaluate the merit of an argument based on the perceived character of the arguer. Framing individuals or movements as uncivil creates an epistemic disadvantage, leading to biased judgments against their positions (Hassan 2024).

Calhoun argues that civility’s limitations lie in its potential to reinforce class distinctions and promote social conformity “rather than justice” (Calhoun 2000, p. 252). Bejan criticizes robust civility because it “risks suppressing dissent and marginalizing minority perspectives” (Bejan, as explained in Casson 2017, p. 499). Zamalin condemns civility for its historical role in maintaining systemic injustices and silencing dissent (2021).

What happens when disagreements are so profound that they seem irreconcilable? Scholars such as Talisse (2021) describe deep disagreements as conflicts rooted in fundamentally incompatible worldviews. These disagreements often lead to polarization, eroding trust and cooperation. Can civility address such challenges?

Argumentative civility offers a way forward by emphasizing the argumentative virtues required to make one's reasons—at a minimum—available, and—ideally—accessible and persuasive to opponents on matters of public concern. Unlike traditional models that emphasize maintaining order or decorum, argumentative civility prioritizes engaging with the substance of disagreements. By providing clear, accessible reasons, it ensures that even contentious arguments are addressed, at minimum, peacefully, and at best, constructively.

As mentioned, critics like Zamalin (2021) warn that civility often delegitimizes radical demands, framing dissent as uncivil and excluding it from public discourse. However, this critique conflates civility with decorum. Is there a way to accommodate radical ideas without sacrificing civility?

In argumentative civility, radical ideas are evaluated based on the reasons provided, not on whether they conform to conventional norms of politeness. This approach ensures that dissenting perspectives are heard and engaged, fostering dialogue rather than exclusion.

Historical examples demonstrate the importance of engaging with deep disagreements civilly. Movements such as abolitionism and suffragism succeeded because they forced societies to grapple with uncomfortable truths. Their leaders engaged in robust argumentation, challenging the status quo while providing reasons that appealed to broader audiences (Hassan 2024). This emphasis on reason-giving underscores the transformative potential of argumentative civility.

One key question arises: how can we maintain peaceful coexistence while allowing not only socio-political changes but also radical transformations? What role does argumentative civility play in addressing such questions? These questions speak to the *telos* of argumentative civility.

So, what is the *telos* of argumentative civility? Is it to manage disagreement constructively? What does constructively mean here?

Does it mean promoting peaceful coexistence? Does it mean finding better or truer solutions? Or is the telos to adequately balance the need for peaceful coexistence with the legitimate push for socio-political transformation? Radical changes often arise from deeply rooted dissatisfaction with the status quo, yet traditional civility frameworks risk delegitimizing these demands by framing them as uncivil. Argumentative civility challenges this dynamic by providing a framework that respects the urgency of radical transformations while fostering non-violent means of addressing conflicts.

To establish a robust theoretical framework for argumentative civility, let us examine its preconditions.

#### **4. Precondition of argumentative civility**

Probably the closest account of civility in the literature to argumentative civility is John Rawls’s. Civility as duty as explained by Rawls imposes upon citizens:

[...] a moral, not a legal, duty to be. . . able to explain to one another on [certain] fundamental questions how the principles and policies they advocate and vote for can be supported by the political values of public reason. This duty also involves a willingness to listen to others and a fairmindedness in deciding when accommodations to their views should reasonably be made” (Rawls, as quoted in Thunder 2006, p. 677).

Argumentative civility concerns with identifying argumenational virtues conducive to satisfying that duty. But before explaining those virtues, let us explore preconditions needed for the possibility of the duty of civility to emerge. We start with equal political dignity.

In short, equal political dignity refers to the principle that all individuals are recognized and treated as having equal worth, status, and rights within a political community. This equal worth is an inalienable political right. It emphasizes that every person, regardless of their background, deserves equal participation and protection under the laws and structures of governance. Unless this principle is respected, sincere public argumentation—where diverse groups and individuals freely and openly argue for their positions—cannot exist. Without this principle, the duty of making reasons available for political claims cannot be generated. Because we have equal dignity, if

you make a claim that affects my life, you have a duty to make your reasons available to me. It is in this context that argumentative civility, as a cluster of argumentative virtues, becomes relevant to political argumentation.

If it is true that politics involves individuals with equal political dignity competing to maximize their interests, and if disagreement is both unavoidable and legitimate in this process, then civility—understood as the duty to provide reasons to opponents on matters with public implications—becomes a cornerstone of peaceful coexistence. To clarify this idea, we must answer two questions: What generates the duty of argumentative civility? and What is the purpose (*telos*) of argumentative civility?

The duty of argumentative civility arises primarily from the fact that political argumentation involves agents who possess equal political worth. Moreover, because advancing one's interests impacts others, there is a duty to make one's reasons accessible when advocating for a particular policy. The *telos* of argumentative civility is to foster competitive yet peaceful coexistence. Argumentative civility is not merely a duty for participants in a global community that upholds equal political dignity; it also reflects the practice of certain argumentative virtues, as it is inherently an argumentative activity. As members of a global community that recognizes equal political dignity, we present arguments to advocate for our interests, while others do the same to advance theirs. The degree to which we embody argumentative virtues in our interactions directly correlates with the civility of our discourse. For a detailed exploration of these virtues, refer to sections six and seven.

Let us now discuss another principle that depends on equal political dignity: the minimum principle for argumentation. A foundational precondition for public argumentation is the minimum principle, which guarantees freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. Disagreeing parties must be able to argue for their worldviews in the public space. If dissatisfied individuals and groups are not allowed to freely express their concerns and advocate for their interests, there is a risk that disagreements may degenerate into coercion or violence.

However, are equal political dignity and the minimum principle sufficient for argumentative civility? These principles *ensure* that

public argumentation is free of coercion, but they do not guide the *quality* of public argumentation. Freedom of speech provides the opportunity for argumentation, but argumentative civility ensures that this opportunity is used constructively. Participants must not only articulate their positions but also engage sincerely with opposing views. I understand argumentative virtues as those epistemic traits that positively affect one's ability to engage in constructive discussion or debate, such as fostering open and reasoned dialogue.

It is important to note that fostering argumentation and debate often occurs among individuals or groups who hold disagreements—sometimes even deep-seated disagreements. Before we can focus on cultivating argumentative virtues, we must first address certain fundamental facts about the reality of politics and collective life. Epistemic virtues are necessary to acknowledge these facts. Epistemic virtues are the opposite of epistemic vices, which are “character traits, attitudes, or thinking styles that get in the way of the gaining, keeping, or sharing of knowledge” (Cassam 2022, p. 182). So, what are these fundamental facts?

The first fact is this: differences of opinion are an inherent feature of any collective existence or political reality. In other words, wherever there is a community, there will inevitably be differences of opinion. While this may seem self-evident, not everyone recognizes or acknowledges it. Those who do, however, demonstrate an accurate understanding of political reality. By definition, such individuals possess epistemic virtues that enable them to gain this accurate perspective.

The next step is crucial. A person who acknowledges the existence of political differences may still reject the naturalness or legitimacy of those differences. Thus, those who not only recognize political differences but also respect their legitimacy hold two accurate epistemic judgments:

1. Recognizing the existence of differences of opinion as a political reality.
2. Respecting the legitimacy of these differences.

In other words, these two epistemic positions are preconditions for developing argumentative virtues.

From these epistemic positions, two essential principles emerge: understanding the concept of legitimate dissensus and adhering to

the minimum principles of argumentation. More precisely, recognizing the principle of political difference leads to an acceptance of legitimate dissensus, while respecting political differences fosters adherence to the minimum principles of argumentation.

With this foundational framework in place, we can now turn to the concept of argumentative civility. It is possible for someone to epistemically respect both legitimate dissensus and the minimum principles of argumentation yet still refrain from engaging in public argumentation. This raises an important question: why should one bother to engage in political argumentation at all?

The answer is straightforward: advancing self-interest. At a minimum, one must convince others of the legitimacy of their political claims to pursue their political interests. At best, they may persuade others to join them in advancing shared interests. Thus, the willingness to engage in argumentation becomes a necessary argumentative virtue. Without this willingness, one cannot effectively advocate for their interests or build consensus to promote them.

### **5. Further conditions for argumentative civility**

If traditional models of civility fall short, what alternative can address their limitations? Argumentative civility redefines civility as a cluster of argumentative virtues. It is not about avoiding conflict or adhering to norms of politeness but about engaging in reason-giving on issues of public significance.

Civility in argumentative exchanges does not necessarily exclude interactions that are “forceful, pointed, and even angry. Civility is not a matter of polite exchange, where one submerges how one feels about the issue and one’s interlocutors under a veneer of pleasant etiquette” (Aikin and Talisse 2021, p. 477). Instead, even in adversarial contexts, civility requires maintaining an argumentative approach by ensuring “reasons [are] accessible to those with whom one disagrees” (ibid). In this sense, the act of making reasons available is central to activating the argumentative features of civility. At its core, civility hinges on the virtue of being willing to engage in meaningful argumentation, or as Aikin and Talisse (2019) put it, being a sincere arguer (p. 212).

Trudy Govier further highlights that offering reasons demonstrates “respect for [arguers] as autonomous, thoughtful people” (as quoted in Love, 2021, p. 634). Consequently, when arguers—whether they are pro-status quo or against it—fail to show such respect, they are guilty of being uncivil in an argumentative sense. From this perspective, the argumentative duty of civility can be defined as engaging virtuously by presenting reasons to opponents on issues of public significance. While civility does not require politeness, providing reasons respectfully is preferable. What truly matters, however, is the willingness to argue. Civility can thus be seen as existing on a spectrum: “the more argumentational virtues one upholds, the more civil one becomes. The ideal civil arguer, therefore, is one who embodies the highest degree of argumentational virtues” (Hassan 2024, p. 312). As a result, such individuals excel in “the art of living with our deepest differences” (Guinness, as quoted in Love, 2021, p. 632). On the other hand, failing to provide reasons on matters of public concern, regardless of one’s stance, amounts to incivility.

Building on our recent progress, we can now define argumentative civility as a form of civility that equips arguers with argumentative virtues, enabling them to engage in discourse that preserves peaceful coexistence while accommodating—rather than delegitimizing—socio-political change. In other words, argumentative civility provides a framework for enabling peaceful socio-political transformations.

This leads us to the central question of this project: What argumentative virtues must we embody to meet the demands of argumentative civility? As members of an argumentative community—whether domestically, locally, or internationally—what kind of arguers do we need to be? Specifically, we must:

- a) Respect the principle of equal political dignity.
- b) Respect the minimum principles of argumentation.
- c) Fulfill the duty of providing reasons for our political claims.
- d) Be open to being convinced of the necessity of socio-political changes—or at least be willing to listen to arguments for them.

In the next stage of our exploration, we will examine the specific virtues required to be a civil arguer in this sense. These virtues will guide us toward fostering argumentative civility in a way that

balances peaceful coexistence with the possibility of meaningful social and political progress.

## 6. Virtue argumentation theory and argumentative civility

Virtue Argumentation Theory (VAT) is a framework within Argumentation Theory that emphasizes the virtues and vices of arguers, focusing on their character rather than solely on the structure or logical soundness of their arguments. VAT is particularly relevant to understanding the role of civility in argumentation by exploring the virtues necessary for someone to engage in civil discourse. While the quality of an argument remains relevant, VAT shifts the primary focus to the character traits of the arguer and their dispositions. According to Aberdein, for example, (2016), “vicious arguments are characteristically those made by vicious arguers (acting in accordance with their vices)” (p. 416).

The aim of argumentation, as Katherina Stevens (then Radziewsky, 2013) states is praiseworthy because “it leads to the improvement of belief-systems; those of the arguers, those of the audience, those of the opponents” (p. 2). The quality of arguments produced by an individual can provide insight into the character of the arguer, as noted by Gascón (2015): “A single bad argument does not make a bad arguer, of course, but the habitual production of bad arguments indubitably does” (p. 468). VAT thus uses the virtues and vices of an arguer to assess the overall quality of argumentation.

In VAT, the connection between the arguer and their argument is critical. Aberdein (2010) argues that virtuous arguers are those who contribute to the spread of true beliefs. As he notes, “where virtuous knowers are disposed to act in a way that leads to the acquisition of true beliefs, virtuous arguers are disposed to spread true beliefs” (p. 173). Mastery of logical reasoning alone is insufficient; arguers must engage in argumentation that disseminates the results of sound reasoning. To propagate true beliefs, an arguer must first possess the virtues necessary to discern what is true or reasonable (Hassan, 2014).

Gascón (2015) emphasizes that even a person with logical expertise can exhibit vices such as bias or intellectual arrogance. For example, an individual may produce a valid argument yet remain

dogmatic or dismissive of opposing views. Additionally, someone who habitually produces poor arguments may occasionally construct a strong one, but this does not make them a virtuous arguer unless their reasoning is intentional and conscientious. A virtuous arguer must, therefore, not only produce good arguments but also advocate for and promote them consistently (Hassan, 2024).

In VAT, logical skills alone do not suffice to produce sound argumentation—a virtuous state of mind is also necessary. Gascón (2015) describes this as a “conscious manner” and a disposition that counters intellectual vices such as arrogance and bias (p. 482). For an arguer to be genuinely virtuous, their commitment to sound reasoning must be habitual rather than incidental. Aristotle’s concept of habituality is central to VAT: virtues must be consistent traits, not sporadic behaviors. For instance, someone who embodies the virtue of charitableness must exhibit this trait consistently, rather than selectively (Hassan 2024).

Argumentational virtues (AVs) are considered “thick virtues” because they possess a motivational component that drives action, unlike “thin virtues,” which lack this force. As Annas and Hursthouse (1999) argue, thick virtues provide “rules for actions” (as cited in Thorson 2016, p. 359). In contrast, logical rules, such as *modus ponens*, offer procedural guidance without prescribing when or why to use them (Thorson 2016, p. 361). VAT, therefore, calls for thick virtues that not only guide how to argue but also motivate arguers to reason virtuously.

The interplay between virtue and vice in argumentation also demonstrates that vices can function as motivational forces. This highlights that both virtues and vices serve as bridges connecting thought to action.

Aberdein’s (2016) typology of argumentational virtues and vices, based on Cohen’s four key virtues—willingness to engage, willingness to listen, willingness to revise one’s stance, and willingness to question assumptions—reflects the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, which positions virtue between deficiency and excess.

In sum, VAT highlights the significance of an arguer’s character, emphasizing that effective argumentation requires both intellectual competence and virtuous dispositions. By cultivating virtuous habits and avoiding intellectual vices, arguers can foster reasoned discourse

that not only enhances their own belief systems but also benefits their audience. In this sense, argumentative civility, as a cluster of argumentative virtues, make sense. A civil arguer is someone who, in adherence to the principles of argumentative civility, exemplifies argumentational virtues. The more virtuous someone is, the more civil they are: those who are most virtuous among us are the most civil among us.

In what follow we examine whether the four principles of argumentative civility discussed before correspond to any virtues that are identified in virtue argumentation theory. As a reminder here the four principles:

- a) Respect the principle of equal political dignity.
- b) Respect the minimum principles of argumentation.
- c) Fulfill the duty of providing reasons for our political claims.
- d) Be open to being convinced of the necessity of socio-political changes—or at least be willing to listen to arguments for them.

Respecting the principle of equal political dignity does not necessarily correspond to any virtues listed in the frameworks proposed by Cohen and Aberdein. However, it is a necessary epistemic belief that correlates with peace. If we believe that our co-arguers are politically equal, we are more likely to tolerate their differing worldviews. Nevertheless, being peaceful does not always imply engaging in argumentation with them. Consider a situation akin to “civil silence,” where people tolerate each other's different perspectives and avoid conflict, yet do not engage in argumentation. Since this remains a pre-argumentation stage, we can conclude that while this condition is necessary, it is not a sufficient criterion for it to be considered an argumentative virtue.

Equal political dignity serves as a precondition for the second principle: the minimum requirement for argumentation. This principle asserts that, for genuine public argumentation to occur, arguers must believe in the inherent rights of freedom of conscience and freedom of expression. These rights are generated by the foundational principle of equal political worth. Still, we do not find direct virtues corresponding to this principle in the suggested lists because argumentation has not yet commenced. However, these epistemic positions are vital to our discussion, as their absence undermines the

minimum conditions required for public argumentation and argumentative civility within the political domain.

It is crucial to acknowledge that these principles are not universally reflected in political realities. While many of us live in societies where such principles are taken for granted, this is not true for everyone. Given this disparity, imagining a conception of civility that facilitates public argumentation not only within one culture but also interculturally requires mindfulness of these foundational principles. With the third principle—fulfilling the duty of providing reasons for our claims—we forcefully enter the realm of argumentation. This principle, which lies at the heart of argumentative civility, directly relates to the first cluster of virtues categorized under the willingness to engage in argumentation (Aberdein 2016). Providing reasons for one's claims on matters of public significance is a manifestation of this willingness. In this sense, civility becomes an argumentative virtue. Moreover, since the willingness to engage in argumentation represents a cluster of virtues, argumentative civility itself becomes a cluster of interconnected virtues. Let us explore some of these virtues.

According to Aberdein (2016, p. 415), the willingness to engage in argumentation includes the following virtues:

1. Being communicative.
2. Faith in reason.
3. Intellectual courage.
4. A sense of duty.

To be argumentatively civil, one must communicate their reasons for a claim on a political matter to their co-arguer, who may agree, disagree, or remain undecided. In doing so, one must demonstrate courage, as their reasons may be perceived as weak, unconvincing, or even nonsensical. Providing reasons requires courage because it invites others to see us as we truly are, exposing us to potential rejection, ridicule, or manipulation.

Additionally, the act of providing reasons is intellectually demanding, especially when dealing with controversial political matters and taking an unconvinced audience seriously. A civil person's willingness to provide arguments demonstrates faith in the power of reason to bridge, or at least narrow, the gap between differing

perspectives. Ultimately, to be civil, one must argue virtuously, making civility a hallmark of virtuous argumentation.

Deficiency of willingness to engage in argumentation, according to Aberdein is unwillingness to engage in argumentation (quietism) (2016, p. 416). Deficiencies in the willingness to engage in argumentation manifest as an avoidance of dialogue and a reluctance to defend or challenge ideas. Such deficiencies include being uncommunicative, mistrusting reason, intellectual cowardice, and dereliction of duty (2016, p. 416). These traits can stem from fear of vulnerability, lack of confidence in one's reasoning abilities, or an unwillingness to confront opposing views. This reluctance undermines the potential for constructive discourse, which is necessary for understanding and resolving complex social and political issues. Without argumentation, misunderstandings and unchecked biases can persist, creating an environment where genuine dialogue is absent.

The excess of willingness to engage in argumentation is undue willingness to engage in argumentation (argument provocateur). Excesses in the willingness to engage in argumentation occur when individuals are overly eager to argue, often inappropriately. This can include being excessively communicative, over-relying on reason, demonstrating intellectual rashness, and exhibiting misplaced zeal (Aberdein 2016, p. 416). Such behaviors can alienate others, escalate conflicts, and reduce the effectiveness of argumentation. For instance, overly communicative arguers may address issues that are better left private or less significant, while over-reliance on reason may dismiss emotional or experiential perspectives essential to certain discussions. Intellectual rashness leads to premature conclusions, and misplaced zeal can result in arguments occurring in unsuitable contexts. These vices detract from the role of civility in a virtuous public argumentation.

Now, let us move to the last principle: Be open to being convinced of the necessity of socio-political changes—or at least be willing to listen to arguments for them. This principle is necessary for argumentative civility for two key reasons. First, if we expect others to listen to our arguments on matters that affect our interests and the community we live in, we must reciprocate by being open to considering their arguments. Second, we must remember that the civility we are envisioning here, addresses critiques of traditional, pro-status

quo civility. For political arguments to serve as catalysts for socio-political change, we must be willing to consider and engage with them. This is the essence of the principle. Now, let us examine the argumentative virtues required for this principle to be realized.

According to Cohen and Aberdein’s classifications of virtues, this principle is clearly linked to two clusters of virtues: willingness to listen to others and willingness to modify one’s own position (2016, p. 215). Together, these clusters satisfy the last principle of argumentative civility. Some virtues that are categorized under the willingness to listen to others include intellectual empathy, fairness in evaluating the arguments of others, and open-mindedness in collecting and appraising evidence (2016, p. 215). Intellectual empathy allows us to view the world from another’s perspective, helping us understand their problems, concerns, and demands. Fairness in evaluating the arguments of others ensures that we avoid bias and do not dismiss legitimate demands from political rivals simply because they oppose our own position. If we lack these virtues, we risk becoming a “vicious audience,” prejudiced and dismissive of others.

Open-mindedness in collecting and appraising evidence is essential not only for maintaining peace but also for bridging gaps between rival parties. This virtue encourages civil discourse, as it demonstrates a willingness to consider others’ reasons. The more open we are to others’ arguments, the more likely they are to engage with us in reasonable dialogue. Ultimately, a society that embraces these virtues fosters a community of reasonableness, even amid the inherent competitiveness of political argumentation.

Aberdein (2016) also identifies the vices that arise from deficiencies in these virtues. A deficiency in intellectual empathy results in intellectual callousness, where one is unable to understand or appreciate others’ perspectives. A lack of fairness in evaluating arguments leads to unfair judgment, dismissing or misrepresenting others’ reasoning. Similarly, a deficiency in open-mindedness results in closed-mindedness, characterized by a refusal to consider evidence or arguments that contradict one’s beliefs.

These vices create arguers who are indifferent to others’ ideas, prejudiced in their judgment, and dismissive of contradictory evidence. A society where these vices dominate risks its peace and loses the collective ability to address pressing issues effectively. If we

want to avoid such a society, we must commit to civil argumentation by embodying virtuous arguing.

On the other hand, an undue willingness to listen to others also leads to vices. Aberdein (2016) describes these excesses as follows: an excess of intellectual empathy results in intellectual sentimentality, where one is overly sympathetic to weak arguments. Excessive fairness leads to undue generosity, granting unmerited validity to flawed or unreasonable arguments. Similarly, an excess of open-mindedness results in impressionability, where one is overly influenced by weak or unsubstantiated evidence.

A vicious arguer exhibiting these excesses may show excessive leniency, over-sympathy toward weak arguments, and a susceptibility to being swayed by inadequate evidence. Such behaviors undermine the quality of discourse and reflect a lack of argumentative discipline. The more these vices are present, the less civil and productive the arguer becomes.

## 7. The relevancy of Islamic tradition to argumentative civility

For argumentative civility to foster intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue, it must be mindful of other argumentative traditions and civilizations. In this section, I initiate the discussion by bringing Islamic perspectives into the conversation. This analysis is by no means exhaustive but serves to broaden our understanding of argumentative civility and start inter-civilizational discussion on argumentative civility.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> I am aware of voices that criticize the negative role religious arguments can play in public deliberation. Richard Rorty, for example, famously described religion in public argumentation as a “conversation-stopper” (1995). When religious speakers rely on premises regarded as sacred—such as verses from holy texts—non-believing interlocutors cannot freely and critically evaluate those premises, because questioning their legitimacy is deemed unacceptable. Responding to critics of his “conversation-stopper” label, Rorty (2010) later softened his position, writing: “I should have simply said that citizens of a democracy should try to put off invoking conversation-stoppers as long as possible. We should do our best to keep the conversation going without citing unarguable first principles, either philosophical or religious. If we are sometimes driven to such citation, we should see ourselves as

Here, I will mainly draw on ideas from what is now known as “Adab Jadal.” I will examine whether Islamic discussions on disputation and debate contain virtuous components that can enrich our understanding of argumentative civility.

Let us start with a brief work titled *Ādāb al-Baḥth wa al-Munāzarah* (The Art of Discussion and Disputation) by the Islamic scholar Abu al-Khayr ‘Iṣām al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muṣṭafā ibn Khalīl Ṭāshkubrīzādah, also known as Ṭāshkōprüzade (d. 968 AH/1561 CE) (Arif 2020, p. 187). Ṭāshkubrīzādah identifies nine rules for virtuous discussion. Let us explore some of these rules and examine their connection to the virtues and vices discussed in Virtue Argumentation Theory.

The first rule emphasizes avoiding both terseness and long-windedness while using familiar terms (Arif 2020, p. 211). According to this rule, the debater should balance conciseness and clarity, avoiding overly brief or excessively long responses. This middle ground aligns with the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean, where both excess and deficiency are discouraged, and virtue is identified with balance. Encouraging the use of familiar language ensures accessibility. This aligns with the virtues of being communicative and demonstrating intellectual empathy in Aberdein’s typology (Aberdein, 2016, p. 415). Being communicative involves conveying ideas clearly without obscurity, paralleling the avoidance of ambiguous terms. Intellectual empathy involves using language the audience can understand, fostering engagement rather than confusion. Both traditions prioritize clarity, comprehensibility, and respect for the audience in the communication process. Violating this rule may result in vices such as being uncommunicative (failure to express oneself clearly)

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having failed, not as having triumphed” (p. 463). My position is that, whether religious or not, arguers should cultivate the virtues that make their claims epistemically accessible to their audiences. The more virtuous we are, the better we can refrain from blocking conversation by introducing unarguable premises. The art of public argumentation, therefore, is to find a balance between speaking our minds freely and being mindful of the impact our arguments would have on our audience. To be civil argumentatively, therefore, is to master the art of public argumentation.

and intellectual single-mindedness (framing issues solely from one's perspective while disregarding others' viewpoints).

The second rule advises against interrupting or attacking the opponent while they present their case (Arif 2020, p. 211). This means that the debater should listen fully before intervening and respond only after understanding the opponent's point. A person embodying this principle can be seen as displaying the virtues of fair-mindedness and intellectual humility (Aberdein 2016, p. 415). Fair-mindedness involves evaluating others' arguments fairly and refraining from dismissive interruptions. Intellectual humility acknowledges the possibility of misunderstanding or the need for further clarification before critiquing. The corresponding vices associated with violating this rule include intellectual arrogance (dismissing arguments without due consideration) and intellectual callousness (showing indifference to others' views) (Aberdein 2016, p. 416). In essence, both frameworks emphasize patience and openness in discourse, discouraging hasty dismissals or interruptions.

Another rule stresses avoiding irrelevant digressions (Arif 2020, p. 211). This rule highlights the importance of keeping discussions relevant to the issue at hand and avoiding unrelated matters. Relevant virtues here include intellectual perseverance and diligence (Aberdein 2016, p. 415). Intellectual perseverance involves staying focused on the argument's core rather than being sidetracked, while diligence entails thorough and careful engagement with the main issue without distraction. Violating this rule demonstrates vices such as misplaced zeal (being overly eager and losing focus) and carelessness (failing to stay on topic). Both systems, therefore, value discipline and focused argumentation to prevent weakening the discourse through irrelevance.

The fourth rule advises refraining from laughing, shouting, and making personal attacks. This aligns with another rule that prohibits belittling or abusing the opponent (Arif 2020, p. 211). According to these rules, disputation must be conducted calmly and respectfully, avoiding personal insults, mockery, or aggressive behavior. A person who adheres to this rule demonstrates virtues such as respect for person (Aberdein 2016, p. 415). In this context, respect for person entails upholding the dignity of one's opponent, even amid disagreement. Corresponding vices, such as intellectual cowardice (avoiding

civil engagement) and dereliction of duty (resorting to hostility instead of reason), illustrate failures in maintaining respectful discourse. In both traditions, the ethical demeanor of a debater is integral to fostering productive discussions.

In *Islamic Disputation Theory* (2021), Larry Miller discusses al-Qirḡisānī, a Karaite Jew (d. after 937), who identifies additional rules of *jadal*. Among these rules are:

“...seek the truth (avoid personal victory at the expense of truth); politeness and avoidance of aggression (refrain from shouting, gesticulating wildly, or belittling the opponent); avoiding hasty responses (know the subject well to avoid defeat); and avoiding debate with contentious opponents (avoid engaging with those who argue dishonestly or for the sake of contention)” (Miller, 2021, pp. 24–26).

Al-Qirḡisānī’s rules of *jadal* emphasize intellectual virtues that closely align with the principles of Virtue Argumentation Theory. Both frameworks prioritize truth-seeking over personal victory, emphasizing fairness, humility, and respect for interlocutors. The rule to “seek the truth” rather than pursue personal triumph reflects the virtue of *intellectual integrity*, a cornerstone in both traditions that fosters honest engagement. Similarly, the emphasis on politeness and the avoidance of aggression parallels the virtues of *intellectual humility* and *respect for persons*, which promote calm, respectful discussions free from hostility or personal attacks. Both approaches recognize that argumentation is not merely a contest of logic but a moral practice aimed at mutual understanding and constructive dialogue.

Additionally, the caution against hasty responses and the encouragement to avoid debating with contentious opponents highlight the virtues of *intellectual diligence*, *patience*, and *discernment*. Both traditions stress the importance of thoughtful, well-informed contributions and the wisdom to disengage from dishonest or bad-faith arguments to preserve the integrity of the discourse. These shared values underscore a common commitment to fostering ethical argumentation, where virtues guide participants toward productive, respectful, and truth-oriented discussions. Thus, both *adab al-jadal* and Virtue Argumentation Theory advocate for an ethical foundation in argumentation that transcends cultural and philosophical divides. It is on these grounds that argumentative civility, as a manifestation of a

cluster of argumentational virtues, can foster intercultural and inter-civilizational debate.

The Islamic tradition of disputation extends beyond this brief survey. Rahmi Oruç, Mehmet Ali Üzelgün, and Karim Sadek (2023) explain in detail that the *munāzara* tradition, founded by Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī in the 13th century, provides a framework for structured and ethical argumentation. Its core objective is to reveal truth and justice, emphasizing cooperation between disputants rather than adversarial victory. *Munāzara* incorporates strict procedural norms to ensure that debates remain constructive and ethical, preventing them from devolving into quarrels. Adherence to these norms distinguishes a proper arguer (*munāzir*) from a mere quarreler (*mujādil*). This tradition also identifies argumentative vices such as arrogance, and hasty objections, which reflect character flaws rather than procedural failures.

In conclusion, there are notable similarities between these traditions. Western Virtue Argumentation Theory emphasizes developing character traits conducive to truth-seeking and productive discourse, such as fairness, humility, and courage. Similarly, the Islamic tradition of *adab* advocates qualities such as patience, respect, and composure, focusing on creating a respectful environment for discovering truth. Both traditions promote fairness, intellectual humility, perseverance, and respect, recognizing that argumentation is not merely an intellectual exercise but an ethical practice aimed at mutual understanding and truth.

Additionally, the Islamic *adab al-jadal* (etiquette of disputation) places a unique emphasis on comportment (*waqār*) and spiritual mindfulness, such as beginning disputes with a prayer (Miller, p. 25), reflecting a holistic approach to intellectual and moral character. By identifying these parallels, it becomes clear that both traditions advocate for argumentation as an ethical practice grounded in mutual respect and truth-seeking, highlighting universal principles of respectful and productive discourse. Therefore, theorizing argumentative civility as a cluster of argumentational virtues to foster intercultural and inter-civilizational discussion is not just an unattainable intellectual ideal; it is a contemporary urgent need based on historical foundations of ethical argumentation.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study has aimed to redefine civility as a framework of argumentative virtues capable of bridging deep disagreements and fostering constructive political engagement. Rather than perpetuating pro-status quo complacency, argumentative civility emerges as a cluster of virtues that centers on respect for equal political dignity, reason-giving, and openness to transformation. By synthesizing insights from Western traditions of Virtue Argumentation Theory (VAT) and Islamic disputation practices (*Adab al-Jadal* and *Munāzara*), the research underscores that civility is not mere politeness but a robust commitment to reasoned engagement.

Reflecting on the nature of political argumentation makes civility not a luxury or an optional ideal but an absolute necessity. Since we have different, if not opposing, interests, we need to be the kind of people who can argue for our positions peacefully, even if the status quo does not serve our interests as we wish. However, it is possible to be peaceful while still exemplifying all sorts of epistemic and argumentative vices.

Argumentative civility demands more than peaceful public argumentation. It requires *adab al-jadal* (the ethics of disputation) and argumentative virtues. For civility to exist, in addition to virtuous argumentation, we must live in a society or global community where the preconditions of argumentative civility are respected. Four key principles underpin argumentative civility. First, respecting the principle of equal political dignity, which ensures that we respect the political dignity of our opponents regardless of race, sex, ethnicity, religion, or political position. Second, respecting the minimum principles of argumentation, which safeguard essential rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of conscience as prerequisites for genuine dialogue. Since we all have equal political dignity, we must also have equal rights to freedom of thought and expression. Third, fulfilling the duty to provide reasons for our claims, which fosters accountability and a culture of reason-based argumentation. When advancing a political argument that, by nature, affects the lives of others who possess equal political worth, we are obligated to make our reasons available to them. Fourth, being open to socio-political changes or, at the very least, being willing to engage with arguments

for such changes, which encourages adaptability and the inclusion of diverse viewpoints.

Together, these principles form a cohesive approach to fostering constructive dialogue, bridging divides, and addressing complex socio-political challenges.

Argumentative civility exists on a spectrum: the more *adab al-jadal* and argumentative virtues one exemplifies in their public argumentation, the more civil they become. This is not difficult to imagine, as two arguers may satisfy the four principles of argumentative civility yet differ in the degree to which they manifest these virtues or follow the rules of *jadal*. Under the framework of cardinal argumentative virtues, Aberdein (2016), for example, lists 27 specific virtues. In the Islamic literature on disputation, we find various accounts of discussion rules (Oruç 2023; Miller 2021; Arif 2020).

In a world marked by political polarization and cultural divides, the findings underscore that argumentative civility is a timely and urgent necessity. By grounding intercultural exchanges in shared argumentative virtues, societies can create spaces for inclusive dialogue, where even radical disagreements are navigated through reason rather than coercion.

Ultimately, argumentative civility offers a path toward a global ethos of reasoned cooperation, enabling communities to live with their deepest differences without sacrificing justice or truth. Thus, civility, when understood as a commitment to argumentative virtues, can transform political and cultural discourse from adversarial confrontations into meaningful collaborations.

We can argue that the more civil we are, the greater our chances are of benefiting from the best reasons available to us. If we advocate for the best proposals using the strongest reasons we know and listen virtuously when others present their best reasons, we can discover the *best of the best* reasons. As a result, we can arrive at the most robust solutions to public issues. Civility, therefore, allows the best reasons to shine. However, this ideal remains utopian unless we begin rethinking civility in alignment with the theory of argumentative civility.

This project is also relevant to debate (although detailing this relevancy is a project in itself). The relevance of this paper to the practice of debate lies in its innovative conceptualization of

argumentative civility, which redefines civility as a cluster of argumentative virtues essential for productive engagement in disagreement. Debate, whether formal or informal, thrives on reason-giving, critical engagement, and mutual respect for diverse perspectives. This research provides a framework for fostering debates that go beyond mere decorum to facilitate meaningful, reason-based dialogue. Thus, this work not only enriches theoretical discussions on civility but also equips debaters with ethical and intellectual tools for engaging in principled disagreement across cultural and ideological divides.

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