Political Lessons from a Theory of Normative Pragmatics
and its Application to a Model of Cultural Conflict:
A Case Study

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Introduction

In this paper, I am going to forward a theory of ethical normativity that uses a theory of conceptual normativity as its foundation. The upshot of such a theory is that it demonstrates an integration between cognitive responsibility and moral responsibility.¹ One implication of this is that the way in which we are supposed to be morally responsible for our actions mirrors the way in which we are supposed to be rationally responsible for our truth claims. The claim that moral responsibility is rooted in rational responsibility, though initially sounding peculiar, proves itself to be continuous with a long tradition of political and legal theories of responsibility dating at least as far back as the Thomistic Natural Law tradition and extending much further beyond into present-day legal distinctions of accountability.²

In order to argue for this theory, in my first section, I will perform a brief overview of what constitutes conceptual normativity by summarizing some key aspects of Robert Brandom’s theory of normative pragmatics.³ I will then offer an undeveloped revision of it in the hopes of offering a better explanation for the origin of rules and of creating the space for the possibility of a kind of ethical

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¹ By conceptual responsibility, I mean the way in which we are disposed (and ought to be disposed) to assessments and evaluations of our truth-claims in accordance with the rules of the society in which we participate and constrained by the rules of the language game in which it is situated. This will be made clearer in the next section. Moral responsibility, on the other hand, concerns the way in which we are accountable for our actions in accordance with the broader community of human beings, whose chief interest is the good of the human being qua human being and, by extension, the common good (which seeks to secure those conditions that maximize the goodness of the human being as such). Much of this (regarding the human good and the common good), and I am inclined to say all of it, is knowable by reason.

² Aquinas himself, for instance, makes it clear than an action (those acts for which we are morally responsible) is that which proceeds from will and reason (Aquinas 2002, 388-93). Similarly, the legal system of the United States has traditionally upheld varying degrees of culpability according to the degree of freedom from external constraints and the degree of deliberation.

³ Though his theory treats conceptual normativity, I hope to demonstrate that it can also be used as a framework for ethical normativity. Also, while I will explain some aspects of his theory, I cannot argue for its premises in this paper. For such an account, one is encouraged to read his current magnum opus, Making it Explicit (Brandom 1998).
normativism. The idea is that such an explanation justifies normativism as an explanatorily robust theory of human activity and interests. In the next section, I will argue that, historically, political concerns have been central for Islam and that, as a consequence, opponents are apt to be suspicious and misunderstand what this means for the religion. I will then proceed to demonstrate how religious adherents and opponents can create a dialogue and resolve their differences by using, as a case study, the more recent American opposition to the construction of Islamic centers in various sites across the United States, paying special attention to the controversy surrounding the opposition to the Islamic Community Center that was proposed and is being developed relatively close to the site of Ground Zero. While the first section is fairly technical in nature, I hope that its practical application in the second section will make it more comprehensible and valuable as a theory that offers a framework for conflict resolution. Due to the constraints of this paper, I will not argue for the theory of conceptual normativity that it presupposes and I will not argue for a host of other such presuppositions, such as my commitments to concepts in phenomenology, discursivity, pragmatism, expressivism, holism, networking, and ethnomethodology. What I will argue is that this theory of normativity in conjunction with this specific example of cultural conflict (which serves as a model for other cases) can help us understand how better to handle future cases of conflict effectively and constructively, whether cultural, political, etc.

Theory: An Introduction to Normative Pragmatics

There is little question that we can consider ourselves to be rule-governed creatures. What is peculiar to us in contradistinction to mere natural things is that we generally believe that what happens to a slab of granite, for instance, happens necessarily in the sense of physical necessity (i.e. we do not treat the

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4 I hope to develop it and defend it elsewhere. As of now, however, it is in its early stages.
5 To state it simply, normativism is the theory that we are rule-governed, rule-following, rule-oriented creatures. We might say that rules are an essential part of human activity.
granite as if it has the capacity to do otherwise) while what happens to a person happens necessarily in the sense of normative necessity (i.e. we treat one another as if we can do otherwise) (Brandom 1998, 30-1). In other words, in practice, we act as if our own behavior and the behavior of others can be construed in terms of what we ought to do rather than what we have to do.⁶ At the moment, I am not speaking of normative in a strictly moral sense, but in a comprehensive conceptual sense.

Any time we apply a concept, we do so normatively.⁷ A concept is that which governs and determines one’s commitments (Brandom 2000, 80; 163). A commitment may be understood to be undertaken in two ways: (1) as a judgment or (2) as an action (164). The normative dimension of conceptual application is that, in practice, we find that either we ourselves or others are able to assess the correctness of our judgment or action insofar as it adheres to or deviates from how we understand the relation between the entitlements, incompatibilities, and entailments of the commitment in question with other commitments in accordance with the proprieties of those relations (189-196).⁸

These relations between commitments can be expressed in terms of rules, such as logical rules (e.g. Law of Non-Contradiction: one ought not simultaneously apply a concept and its negation in any process of reasoning), behavioral rules (e.g. Law of Equal Autonomous Agents: one ought not perform any action that violates the autonomy of another who is perceived to be one’s equal), moral rules (e.g.

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⁶ To be clear, following Aristotle, I think I should point out that normative necessity does not exclude physical necessity. It is clearly the case that we are governed by physical necessity at least some of the time, but the claim here is that it is physical necessity in addition to normative necessity (Aristotle 2004, 81-4). Brandom’s thought is similar, attributing it instead to Kant and arguing that the difference between physical necessity and normative necessity is our being able to position an “intervening attitude” between the rule and the execution of the rule (Brandom 1998, 30-2). Of course, I am aware that while we are starting out with what looks to be the case (i.e. it feels like we are governed by normative necessity), I am not ignorant of the possibility that it might actually be physical necessity underlying all of it.

⁷ I should also take care to mention the rationale for this claim. Brandom argues via Kant that concepts have the “form of rules” and thereby “specify how something ought (according to the rule) to be done.” As such, they necessarily have a “normative character” (Brandom 2000, 163). It is also important to note that prior to the application of any concept is the selection of a concept. And while the application of a concept is ultimately authorized by others, the selection of a concept is authorized by oneself (Brandom 2002, 219-20). Selection, then, presupposes some degree of autonomy (i.e. we are at least free insofar as we can choose what concept to use), but it has its constraints if it is to be put to use.

⁸ The force of these assessments is entirely contingent on one’s attitude towards the goodness of the proprieties governing these relations (Brandom 1998, 52).
Golden Rule: one ought to treat others as one would like to be treated oneself), and the like, but if they are to be evaluable and alterable, they must be expressible in assertional acts and, further, logically codifiable (152-3). The reason why it is necessary for these conditions has to do with the nature of logic itself, whose function is truth-preservation. While assertions make explicit the content of thoughts, logical vocabulary makes explicit the inferential relations that are involved in those claims (Brandom 1998, 105-6; 109). According to Brandom, it is a “fundamental semantic principle” that “a good inference never takes one from premises that are true to a conclusion that is not true,” but we must keep in mind that the lesson from Frege is that we need to understand truth as that which has an expressive role, i.e., it is a way of articulating how we treat things in practice, how we take things to be true (111-14). The virtue in expressing the contents of claims and treating them as somehow binding in their use (that is, as necessarily presupposing and entailing other commitments via inferential relations) is that it places us in a better position to develop a fuller understanding of what a claim means, it creates an opportunity to alter the contents of that claim, and it allows us to judge whether the entitlement to a commitment is warranted.

It follows from this dimension of assessment in conceptual application, then, that such processes exhibit, as an essential feature, some notion of cognitive responsibility. During the

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9 He writes, “Vocabulary deserves the appellation ‘logical’ just in case it serves to make explicit, as the content of a claim, properties concerning the use of the expression that otherwise remain implicit in practice, specifically the properties in virtue of which it has the conceptual content that it does” (Brandom 1998, 114).

10 Much of this can also be construed in terms of a kind of legitimation theory. Stacie Goddard, for instance, argues that legitimation is a matter that depends on how the actors treat the territory in question (Goddard 2006). While she rightly sees that legitimation is a socio-cultural phenomenon and that an actor’s claims are legitimized depending on her position within those socio-cultural institutions, Goddard fails to appreciate the importance of the historical dimension to the question of legitimation. For I do not think that it is as simple as reducing the historical to the socio-cultural (this is a basic Hegelian insight). For instance, when we discuss the appropriateness of a cultural symbol, we must not neglect that the interpretation of the meaning of that symbol is a social and historical affair; the meaning of the symbol derives from its current treatment and the history in which it is grounded. We thus decide whether the current treatment is legitimate by also determining whether it is consistent with the historical tradition of the symbol. Meanwhile, the social and cultural institutions confer statuses on the actors involved that legitimate their authority and bind them to what they are permitted and not permitted to do. In this more comprehensive sense, we might envision legitimation, then, as the resolution of commitments that the actors involved treat as incompatible, i.e., a synthesis of sorts. I should take care to stress
application of any concept, one has a responsibility for how one understands the content of her commitment and this is a responsibility to others who can judge whether the commitment adheres to or deviates from the norms recognized by the others. In many cases, such assessment happens merely behaviorally. For instance, one might violate the social norms of a community by performing the action of theft of another person’s property. Others in the community, believing this act to be a perversion of the norm that one is entitled to one’s own goods and a deviation from the norm that one ought not take by force or deception the goods of another, then begin to sanction this perpetrator, usually by ostracizing her from the community (concerning which imprisonment is a form), demanding restitution and service in proportion to the damage of the common good, or by inflicting punishment, psychological or corporal (concerning which execution is a form). By expressing the content of how one understands the concept employed, however, one can initiate a process of assessment known as negotiation, where others determine, and likewise express, that your understanding of the concept is either permissible or impermissible, in which latter case one is then obliged to offer a defense of one’s understanding to the satisfaction of the others who challenged it or to abandon it (Brandom 2002, 221; 225). One may, however, challenge the challengers if one can offer a good reason for doing so (Brandom 1998, 176-7). Thus, our perpetrator need not perform the action first but is now capable of explaining why she believes it to be a good idea to take another’s property. In so doing, others are capable of challenging her and, if the challenge proves successful, putting her in a position to remove her socially misguided commitment. Paradigmatically, concept use, then, is a social affair (whether it is expressed or implicit in practice).

The question, then, is: At what point do these rules we use during concept application and negotiation come into play? This question can be subdivided into two concerns: what is the source of this rule and what is the source of rules simpliciter. Brandom believes Kant to have been the first to

that part of the goals of this paper is to emphasize the importance of these social and historical dimensions generally, but especially in the case of conflicts.
recognize in a significant way the normative dimension of conceptual activity and he also believes that Kant tried to deal with its associated problems (19-20). We might refer to them as: 1) The problem of the origin of rules and 2) The problem of rule regression. With regards to the first issue, Kant assumed that these rules are hard-wired into one’s conceptual apparatus. Not only is the use of rules a consistent human phenomenon, but even the rules themselves are conveniently available to everyone at all times. Kant’s approach to conceptual application in experience, then, was a two-stage approach. First, we search around for an available rule in our mind and once we find one, we then go to our current experience and check to see whether the rule applies. If the particular (that is, the material governing the present circumstance) is not able to fall under the category of the universal (the generally formulated rule), then we start over until we have success (Brandom 2002, 212-4).

With regards to the second issue, Brandom shows how we can draw on some of the lessons from Wittgenstein (Brandom 1998, 20-2). Wittgenstein points out that rule application itself must be governed by a rule. The reason why we select this rule rather than that rule must be because another rule tells us when and why it is appropriate to select it. But this, too, requires a rule. And so on and so forth into what Wilfrid Sellars calls “a vicious regress” (Sellars 2007, 28-9) Leaving aside the fact that Kant’s assumption to the first problem is circular, the two problems are intimately related to one another. While Kant successfully moved conceptual application away from the ontological (whether some representation conforms to some object) to the deontological (whether this judgment adheres to a rule), he failed to solve these coordinate problems (Brandom 2002, 212).

It is Hegel who Brandom argues adopts the Kantian strategy and solves Kant’s problems by using a new line of approach. Whereas Kant was merely thinking in terms of the organism, Hegel thought about this in terms of the individual and society (216-8). Hegel’s approach is an orthogonal one. To resolve the first issue, Hegel suggests that rules come from society and history. It is true that Hegel

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11 In effect, the argument is that rules come from using rules. There is also the problem of explaining how autonomy is possible when using a conceptual apparatus thesis (Brandom 2002, 218-9).
agrees with Kant insofar as a person is free to choose which commitment (judgment / action) she acknowledges, but she is not free to determine the contents of that commitment and thus whether it conforms to the conceptual rule. What does determine the contents of the concept and whether one’s commitments correctly conform to it are others. The other members of society act as administrators of conceptual contents. You decide what it is you want to believe and how you want to act and they decide whether or not you successfully accomplished your goals and acted accordingly. Though Kant believed we were bound by rules, he could not adequately explain how this was so in light of our apparent autonomy. Hegel’s answer is that others guarantee that we are bound by the rules of our choosing; we choose the piece of the chess board we want to play and then our opponent determines whether we have played that piece appropriately (215-22). The game is established via a social process.

One troubling consequence that could result is whether others might simply declare that anything we say or do is correct. Hegel is able to avoid this sort of communal relativism by positing the historical dimension of conceptual activity. An appropriate metaphor that Brandom uses in this regard is likening the process to common law rather than statute law (230-4). There are no dictates that determine how common law is to be settled. Instead, the judge relies on precedent. Likewise, in our own conceptual application, what settles whether we have correctly applied our concepts is how those same concepts have been applied traditionally. This is accomplished through a process of rational reconstruction. Acting as a judge of sorts, we look back through “cases” of the concept in its use and determine whether this current use can be explained as an appropriate extension of or conformity to the prior applications of the concept. This explanation is not something that we have to do nor is this an activity that we have to undertake every time we use a concept. It is something that we are obliged to do if we are going to justify the use of a concept during the course of a challenge from others. This does not entail that the majority of the community exercises a tyranny over what one ought to believe or how one ought to act, for while the “judges” at present do have authority over whether the concept is
being used in an appropriate manner, their authority is held in check by the “judges” to come. Some future “judge” might decide that my understanding of the concept was an aberration from the history rather than part of its progression. And, of course, this can be overturned by other “judges” even further in the future (233). Thus, a concept derives meaning from its tradition, but its current use in practice also simultaneously alters the tradition in which it is being understood.

While Brandom successfully explains the origin of this rule in these circumstances via the Hegelian story, he still fails to solve the general manner of the first issue and explain, ultimately, from where rules come. My contention is that our proclivity for rule-following is rooted in our experience of a world that exhibits a fair degree of regularity. That there is such regularity that can be observed in the natural world is an observation that imposes itself on us, both psychologically and pragmatically.

As argued at the beginning of this section, and this is an insight that I attribute to Aristotle (though one that Brandom recognizes too), the world is not populated by objects of the same sort at the Newtonian level.\(^\text{12}\) It has objects that abide by the laws of physics and those that abide by the laws of physics-in-addition-to... (in addition to biological mechanisms, in addition to reason, etc.). While we have a capacity to choose which laws to follow, I argue that it is a capacity that is awakened from the is (the world of facts, occurrences, states-of-affairs, etc.). We have the capacity to sense and observe regularities and these regularities give us an idea of how something is supposed to be, generally speaking, until we realize we can do otherwise.\(^\text{13}\) The ought, then, tells us one of two things: how to preserve an existing regularity or how introducing a new regularity can make the current state-of-affairs better. Though in Brandom’s story it is the regularities assumed by the community in practice that make the judgments and actions of the individual meaningful, that there are any such regularities for the

\(^{12}\) Perhaps it is on the quantum level, but this is besides the point for this is a question of privileging one reference class as opposed to another. I take it as a general principle that, when possible, we ought to privilege the reference class of those things we regularly encounter in experience in a meaningful way.

\(^{13}\) Though I do not currently have a developed story about this, it is likely that such realization is contingent upon physical regularities having an aberration, which causes us to take notice and entertain possibilities of something’s being otherwise. We might say that aberrations awaken choices.
community at all presupposes, I argue, this more fundamental regularity of nature and how it affects us as rational creatures, that is, creatures whose interests are principally directed by concerns for not merely living, but living well. Such prescripted patterns of behavior primarily aim at preserving practices currently instituted or attempting to improve those practices for the sake of improving the functions of the community. This dual-purpose (preservation or improvement) is the justification for normativism as a theory and explains why we consider following such rules to be a worthwhile practice in the first place. One should also note that, while I am claiming that the *ought originates* with the *is*, this is by no means a reductivist account since I am *not* claiming that the *ought can be explained in terms of the is*. On the contrary, it is highly meaningful on its own terms.

**Praxis: An Application of a Normative Pragmatic Theory of Ethics: Historical Propadeutic**

Before beginning, in a religious context, one of the distinctions that needs to be drawn is that between *belief in creed* and *belief in practice*. The difference is subtle, but significant. Creed refers to the *explicit* formulations of the rules of a community. While we can now suppose that a Kantian approach would suggest that creed comes first and *then* practice, we need only recall that one of the lessons learned in the previous section is that, given that we are rule-governed creatures, if we rely on rules being explicitly formulated *first*, we run into the problem of rule regress. Instead, the alternative is to follow Brandom’s suggestion that such *explicit* formulations are expressions of what a community has been *implicitly* doing in practice all along. That is to say, the *explicit* is derivative from and parasitic on what is *implicit* in practice. We first know *how to do* something before we are able to *say that* we are doing it or *that this is how it ought* to be done. As such, creed then must be understood as an explicit codification of religious practices that were already implicitly a part of the community’s commitments (i.e. the common set of concepts applied in judgments and actions). It does not follow, however, that once explicitly formulated, the rules are to be rigidly applied, but it *is* the case that the rules are codified *by*
and interpreted with the continuing practices. One need only recall Brandom’s common law example from the previous section. Such is even more pronounced when it comes to religious rules.

In most religious cases, an explicit codification of a rule can be understood to be expressed in a heavily poetic manner.\(^{14}\) As such, these kinds of rules in particular are more evasive than usual when it comes to the determination of their contents via processes of selection, application, and negotiation. A natural consequence, for instance, is the division of religious communities into sects due to interpreting how one is to understand the relations of commitments differently. Whereas, when most of us use the judgment, “This is a Gala apple,” it has a fairly determinate (though certainly not fixed) meaning for most of the members of our community. For instance, we can infer that whatever this is, it is also a fruit or that, assuming the apple is ripe, it is also something that has a certain degree of sweetness. But any passage in a holy text has a wide variety of interpretations depending on who is asked. One might think that the lack of a fairly fixed meaning is problematic for religious commitments, but, appearances aside, this is actually a good thing for religious creeds, for this makes them very flexible, dynamic, and adaptive. There is little doubt that it makes some contribution to why they have been able to survive for as long as they have. This dynamicity and flexibility is especially necessary for rationally reconstructing how one is to understand the beliefs of a religious community currently.

Two of the central issues concerning the Islamic Cultural Center proposed to be constructed at Ground Zero is that many of the protestors believe that the sources of the funding for the project are possibly terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda, and / or they believe that this action is an expression of victory and triumph over American values and that it is both insulting and humiliating to the victims who lost their lives in the tragedy of September 11 (Griffith 2010).

A large part of the reason for the opposition has to do with how the protestors conceive of Islam and it appears that they believe it to be an entirely politically-oriented religion with the notion of jihad

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\(^{14}\) That is to say that they are more akin to general precepts and universal categories than they are exhortations to historically and culturally situated, particular practices.
as a central concept. From one level of analysis, this is not entirely incorrect. Each of the principal western religions had founding insights that took the material of the times available and propelled it into novel directions. Judaism’s was a non-natural monotheism and the emphasis on law (the former perhaps inspired by the Egyptian Akhenaton while the latter likely inspired by the Babylonians); Christianity’s was universal, concernful love (perhaps inspired by Roman sentiments of fraternity); and Islam’s was synthesizing politics and religion (perhaps inspired by the need for unification in a culturally fragmented 6th century Middle East), believing Judeo-Christianity’s failure was political passivity,\textsuperscript{15} while trying to \textit{preserve} their insights (Black 2004, 9-10).\textsuperscript{16} There were good reasons for this belief regarding political passivity.

Judaism, with its reliance on the law, rarely felt compelled to differentiate itself from the state. As long as they could remain obedient to their laws and customs, they could tolerate the ruling government (10). Not only was this true amidst Roman rule, but one of the first expressions of desperation after the Exodus was a desire to return to Egypt. At least for the early Jews, living in an atmosphere of religious freedom was all that was required.

One of the theological innovations of Christianity was the emphasis on the idea of otherworldliness. Paul, for instance, painstakingly urges Christians to \textit{avoid} the temptations of \textit{this world} and exhorts us to \textit{look beyond}, while this world was likened to a mere temporary station. The ultimate goal for the Christian was always elsewhere; the people were merely expected to \textit{endure}. Political passivity, perhaps even more so than for the early Jews, seemed built into the very structure of Christianity,\textsuperscript{17} a feature that Islam sought to overcome.

\textsuperscript{15} Consider, for instance, some of the mottos that came out of the Christian tradition: “We’re a pilgrim people”; “We’re not of this world”; etc.
\textsuperscript{16} Christianity, too, tried to preserve Judaism’s insights, especially its founding insight of the non-natural monotheism.
\textsuperscript{17} This is one reason why Augustine writes \textit{The City of God: Against the Pagans}. Throughout, he uses scriptural references and contrasts the life of the \textit{city of man} with the life of the \textit{city of God}. 

It is true that Christianity was the first to emphasize warfare, likely due to Zealous and Apocalyptic Judaic tendencies, but after the Resurrection (and Paul’s efforts), it was understood as a wholly spiritual warfare.\(^\text{18}\) The epitome of this attitude was thought to be summarized in Jesus’ response: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's; give to God what is God's." Even when Christendom became the state religion of the Roman Empire it was seen as a victory over the Devil and the forces of evil, i.e., a spiritual victory that signaled the imminent return of Christ, rather than a necessary earthly victory (Russell 1988, 49-50; 53-4; 86). It was a kind of earthly victory by accident. There was no active, aggressive attempt to physically battle the armies of the Roman Empire. The term spiritual was always understood Orphically, as something other than the material, earthly, worldly, bodily (19; 24).

One of early Islam’s missions was to unify all of the tribes (Black 2004, 10-2).\(^\text{19}\) Because of their diverse backgrounds, and arguably geographical landscape (which affects availability of resources), it was necessary to enforce this unification. There was no common thread amongst the tribes, but Muhammad, like Homer for the Greeks, was becoming the locus of culture and history for the tribes. In this respect, in a sense, he invented their culture and supplied them with their first unifying narrative out of which they could function as one. With each successful political victory, he gained more credibility, increasing the confidence in the truth of his words (12-3; 20).\(^\text{20}\)

Jihad is the idea that one is at war for the sake of one’s own spiritual welfare. Given the integration of spiritual concerns with political concerns, it could seem like jihad was, indeed, a central concept. While this may have been inherited from Christianity, it is interpreted in a variety of ways: a personal spiritual warfare (Pauline), a communal spiritual warfare, a spiritual-physical warfare, and, of

\(^\text{18}\) On these points, I recommend Jeffrey Burton Russell, especially his text, The Prince of Darkness, where he reviews the development of the idea of the devil in the Western tradition and where he also treats the development of Christianity in light of the former interest (Russell 1988, 28-62).

\(^\text{19}\) Iran was an exception, though its monarchical proclivity would be absorbed by a fertile Islam that had prepared itself for it (Black 2004, 52).

\(^\text{20}\) A similar idea was also enacted by Christianity in the Middle Ages where success was treated as a divine guarantee that one was acting rightly.
the alleged more extreme varieties, that we need to plunge the world into chaos so that the Imam can return, set things right, and distribute justice.

Regardless of how *jihad* is conceived, the primary role of the leader of the community was to guarantee that one’s spirituality could be lived out as easily as possible. This is why it was believed that the *religious* leader ought also to have been given the *political* role of overseeing the organization and function of the community (21-4). It is in this respect that it differs from Christianity and Judaism. It seems there was no intention to live within a state; the struggle was most easily dealt with by living as a state. Because of this, Islam was able to appropriate and innovate the concept of *spiritual*; it became understood monistically (the material had the spiritual wrapped up within itself). There was no hard dualism in the Christian sense. Holiness could be secured right here and now, and indeed, it was an imperative to actively bring this about. To borrow Augustinian terminology, we might say that, for Islam, the city of man is the city of God inchoate.

Thus, in its genesis, that is to say, *at bottom*, we might say that Islam was very much political and it had every intention of being so. On the other hand, if we chose to discuss Islam at top, we would be obliged, by way of rational reconstruction, to present the *historical and social development* of Islam hitherto and how we ought to understand it now. The central question is: Does Islam need to be thoroughly political *currently*? There is no easy answer to this. If one wishes to avoid naïveté, then one ought to realize that it ultimately depends on which sect is under discussion and what its central theological commitments are. However, the matter can still be treated generally to a degree.

If the emphasis on the political dimension and *jihad* are indeed founding insights of Islam, as I have presented it, you cannot divorce the two without completely sterilizing the religion, rendering it impotent, just as Christianity without *agape* or Judaism without Yahweh and Mosaic Law would be

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21 A reason why Iranian patrimonialism was so easily integrated (20-1).

22 Any religious adherent ought to strive to understand the current practices in light of the creed and, likewise, the creed in light of the current religious practices. It is a mutually interdependent, reciprocal process.
absurd. It seems that politics is always a central theme of Islam, but more importantly, it is in how the term political is understood and interpreted where the concerns can be addressed. Some are satisfied with simply having an Islamic state, wherever it might be; others see no contradiction living within a state, whatever its religious commitments or lack thereof are. Much of this depends on how one understands jihad, and it is an injustice to the religion and an act of ignorance to assume that it is a matter of physical warfare.

Praxis: An Application of a Normative Pragmatic Theory of Ethics: Resolution

Insofar as politics and jihad are central themes of Islam, the voiced opposition to the Islamic Cultural Center at Ground Zero is understandable. Of course, it is necessary to elicit more precise reasons from protestors so that a dialogue can be established, but the challenge itself is fair. As a result, the developers of the Center have a condition that needs to be satisfied if the challenge is to be resolved, namely, the founders, religious leaders, and financiers have a duty to make explicit their intentions, goals, and hopes from its construction. Furthermore, they have a responsibility to the people within the community to establish dialogue, show good will, and contribute to the community in a manner that reasonably seeks to satisfy the concerns of those affected.

One difficulty that arises from this proposal is how to enforce that such conditions are, indeed, required and how to determine whether they are satisfied. The answer is that there is no formally designated person or group that enforces anything. The enforcement itself is played out in the way with which we interact with one another in practice, namely, by conferring deontic statuses on one another, by adopting intentional stances regarding how one is to understand the words and actions of another,

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23 One need only remember that the word islam itself means submission (to the God).
24 Indeed, Sharif El-Gamal is beginning to do precisely this. Recently, he has expressed regret over how this construction has been handled over the past year and a half, but he is becoming increasingly outspoken about his beliefs and intentions now, referring to terrorists as “criminals acting in the name of his faith,” planning a September 11 memorial in his building, and hoping to conduct interfaith meetings at the Center as well (Adler 2011).
and by ascribing various attitudes and commitments to one another (i.e. believing that another occupies social position X, acts for reasons A, B, and C, and has commitments to beliefs D, E, and F). While, in practice, this is a matter of what we do, the virtue is that it is able to be cast into explicit terms for the purposes of assessing and altering beliefs and behaviors. The satisfaction of the condition, then, is something that can only be demanded, ensured, and settled by the community of those affected, and the reasonableness of the condition ought to be articulated such that it can be assessed by the community of rational language-users at large to meet criteria of adequacy (both formal and material). It is also this broader community who is best able to make such assessments in light of and for the sake of the good of the human being as such and the common good. In other words, the responsibility for one’s beliefs is also a responsibility to those directly involved as well as rational language-users as a whole. While the smaller community is free to challenge others and set the conditions for satisfying the challenge on the basis of conflicts between specific beliefs, this larger, all-encompassing community serves as an objective judge, permitting and prohibiting beliefs and actions on the bases of reason, goodness, and fairness. All of this can be played out, so to speak, through the drama of attitudes and actions without any necessity for some formal, meta-authority authorizing, evaluating, and enforcing such beliefs and behaviors. Every conflict, then, ought to concern all of us, as long as we see to it that we respect individual differences and beliefs and evaluate the merits of challenges and conditions according to the rules of reason and propriety, as well as a concern for the good of the human being and the common good.

I shall now offer an attempt to explain this non-theoretically via examples. Consider the following:

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25 While, traditionally, the idea of behavior is that it is a mere differential response to one’s environment, and this is the way that Brandom understands it (Brandom 1998, 7), I am using it in this context as a disposition to specific actions, and am doing so for lack of a better word. I may change this in the future so as to preserve the distinction between acts and behavior.
Scenario One
Person A ascribes the belief that Gala apples have an ultra-violet color to Person B.
Person B denies that this belief is one that he endorses.
Person A is disallowed, according to the rules enforced by the community of language-users at large, to attribute that idea to Person B any longer...as long as Person B does not perform any actions that warrant such doxastic attributions.26

Scenario Two
Person A ascribes the belief that an apple a day keeps the doctor away to Person B.
Person B acknowledges that this belief is one he endorses.
Person B vindicates his endorsement of this belief by laying out the premises that justify it and demonstrating what such a belief entails. Further, neither anything in the premises nor the conclusions proves to be incompatible with the commitments and behavior of the community.
Person A is disallowed to commence with censuring Person B lest the community of language-users sanction Person A via attributing the status that Person A is no longer a reliable authority in this scenario and this respect.27

Scenario Three
Person A ascribes the belief that the speed of light might not be a constant to Person B.
Person B, unable to justify the idea on his own terms, defers to Person C as a reliable authority on this matter.
Person A is now required to approach Person C for vindication of the belief.28

Scenario Four
Person A ascribes the belief that forcibly taking another’s rightful property ought to be socially acceptable to Person B.
Person B fails to justify the acceptance of either the auxiliary commitments that would warrant the conclusion and / or the entailments that follow from the belief in question.29
Person B is now required by the community of language users to abandon his commitment lest the community attributes statuses of unreasonableness or unreliaibility to him with respect to these matters.

26 There are three ways in which one can be said to believe something: by avowing it, by acting as if, and by way of a necessary consequence of other beliefs (Brandom 2000, 174-5).
27 Attributing unreliability to others is a form of communal ostracizing as well. This sort of sanctioning is ideal since it does not necessitate that one is entirely removed from or entirely indebted to a community. Instead, one is merely ostracized on these matters but not those (e.g. one is considered to be a poor money handler but an excellent cook). For more on reliability attributions, see: Brandom, Articulating Reasons: An Introduction to Inferentialism, 2000, pp. 97-102 and 117-22.
28 This is another form of justifying a belief. If someone is considered reliable, it entitles others to adopt or use her beliefs. If, however, these others are challenged, they may defer to the initial person for the reasons for that belief (Brandom 1998, 176-8). This is most evident in the field of science. I might claim that all physical objects are composed of sub-atomic particles, but if you challenge me, given my poverty in theoretical physics, I would defer your challenge to one who is considered an expert in such matters.
29 One way to justify a belief is to give the reasons that necessitate it. Another way, however, is to show the utility of the belief by arguing for the good reasons that follow from it (Brandom 1998, 116-21).
There are three important things worth noting: 1) These are idealized circumstances. What happens in fact is scarcely as neat; 2) The scenarios given are not exhaustive but illustrative of various possibilities; 3) Vindication is not to be understood as logical vindication per se; it is simply vindication by sufficient satisfaction of the challenger. Obviously, formal logical vindication can very well result in a regress for as long as entitlement to the premises are in question; however, this can be avoided if we set a constraint on possible challenges, namely, that the challenge itself needs to be licensed. Thus, as noted earlier, a premise is questionable only so long as there is good reason for questioning it. Such a constraint disarms something like Cartesian hyper-skepticism and infinite regresses.

To return to the present topic and conclude, the community of those affected is demanding justification for the building of the Cultural Center. This issues responsibility to those involved because of the challenge of these assertions. First, there is responsibility on our end, being part of the community of rational language-users, to assess whether or not the demands for justification are, in fact, licensed and whether the conditions for justification are reasonable. In this particular instance, given the importance of the political character of social life ensuring the spiritual welfare for Islam, at least prima facie, the concerns seem understandable. If these concerns of the community affected are indeed found to be licensed, it issues a responsibility to those developing the center to meet those justifications. We have seen that such justifications can be met either explicitly (i.e. saying that such and such is or is not the case) or implicitly (i.e. acting or failing to act according to such and such expectations). A consequence of meeting or failing to meet those justifications will be social acceptance (via vocal support, physical support, tolerance, etc.) or social sanctioning (via protests, voiced concerns, and the like), respectively. In the cases of conflict, not only do we have a conceptual obligation, as language-users, to assess each other’s commitments and begin negotiation, we especially have a moral obligation, as human beings, to resolve those conflicts while ensuring that such resolution is always directed to the good of the human being as such and the common good. What this illustrates is that the
resolution of cultural conflict can be hastened in a constructive manner if we *knowingly* partake in these practices, *strive* to make them explicit, assess them *accordingly*, and become *willing* to adopt or abandon our beliefs and actions in light of the results.
Bibliography


