# *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.[4]  The idea is that such an explanation justifies normativism as an explanatorily robust

theory of human activity and interests.[5]  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).[9]  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*.[10]  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, proprieties concerning the use of the expression that otherwise remain *implicit* in practice, specifically the proprieties 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

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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,[11] 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 administers 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.[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.[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

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[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 organiziations, 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,[15] while

trying to *preserve* their insights (Black 2004, 9-10).[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 *avoid* the temptations of *this*

*world* and exhorts us to *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 *endure*.

 Political passivity, perhaps even more so than for the early Jews, seemed built into the very structure of

Christianity,[17] a feature that Islam sought to overcome.

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[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.

[16] Christianity, too, tried to preserve Judaism's insights, especially its founding insight of the non-natural monotheism.

[17] This is one reason why Augustine writes *The City of God: Against the Pagans*.  Throughout, he uses scriptural references and contrasts the life of the *city of man* with the life of the *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.[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).[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).[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

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[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).

[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).

[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.[21] 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*.[22] 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.[23]


**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.[24]

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.[25]  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 unreliablility to him with respect to these matters.

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[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.

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