Signs of Salvation

A Festschrift for Peter Ochs

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Introduction

The Wisdom of Peter Ochs

From Common Sensism to Scriptural Pragmatism

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It is a great honor to present this collection of essays to Peter Ochs on behalf of his colleagues and students. These essays by scholars in a wide range of academic disciplines are a testimony to the generative potential of Ochs' distinctive pragmatic philosophy.

Ochs' pragmatism revitalizes the Jewish wisdom tradition within the context of modernity. Classical Jewish sages adopted the ordinary language term "wisdom" to refer to a practical mode of rationality concretely realizable in individual habits and communal life. So too Ochs identifies the locus of our deepest human wisdom in common sense beliefs implicit in everyday practices. The sages also believed, however, that to speak adequately about wisdom requires speaking about its relation to God as the ultimate source of wisdom and life. In the same way, Ochs speaks of God's Word which, through scripture, can repair our common sense, bringing life-giving wisdom to communities on the brink of death.

In this introduction, we aim to show how Ochs' pragmatic reappropriation of the classical wisdom tradition emerges in the confrontation between Judaism and modernity. We offer these words with trepidation. To represent any thinker's thought in a finite string of words inevitably involves selecting and freezing elements of an infinite living process of thinking. In Ochs' case, the task is especially difficult because of the remarkable range, subtlety, and

generativity of his thought. Nevertheless, we hope that this introduction can serve as one possible entry to the world of Ochs' philosophy.

We begin in section I by tracing the genealogy of Ochs' thought to two philosophical traditions that correct modern philosophy by appealing to the rationality implicit in practice. From German and American Jewish philosophers, Ochs learned to respond to modern challenges to the intelligibility of Jewish life by seeking the rationality implicit in Jewish practices. In the American pragmatist Charles Peirce, Ochs found a method of appealing to the logic of scientific practice to correct modern philosophy itself.

In section II, we sketch the common-sensist and scriptural dimensions of Ochs' pragmatism. In response to the Cartesian anxiety that plagues modern thought, Ochs appeals to the deep wisdom of common sense—vague but indubitable rational commitments implicit in our everyday practices and ordinary language. But in light of the recurring crises of Jewish history that threaten the intelligibility of Jewish life and practice, Ochs also recognizes occasions when common sense may fail and ordinary methods of pragmatic repair prove inadequate. Ochs' scriptural pragmatism describes how, through scripture, God's Word can heal communities in crisis, transforming their common sense and renewing their language.

If practice is the locus of rationality, then a philosophical theory's full meaning can only be determined, and its validity tested, with reference to its practical fruits. Section III examines the ways that Ochsian wisdom has borne fruit in communities of practice. Through the practices of Textual Reasoning and Scriptural Reasoning, modern readers are habituated in a distinctively scriptural wisdom governed by a pragmatic logic. In the Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice program at the University of Virginia, Ochs has built an academic community that shows how this wisdom can correct modern academic practices. In his Hearth to Hearth peacebuilding work and his recently developed method of Value Predicate Analysis, Ochs puts the wisdom of scriptural pragmatism to work creating conditions for interreligious peace.

In section IV, we introduce the essays offered to Ochs in this volume, as a small sample of the many ways Ochs' wisdom has borne fruit in his colleagues and students. As is fitting for a man who preferred to practice "face-to-face theology,"[1] these essays reflect not only the influence of his thought but, above all, the force of his person as a teacher and friend. We offer these essays in the hope that the wisdom of Peter Ochs will be more apparent as it is refracted in the words of those who have learned from him.

1. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 19.

I. Genealogy of Ochs' Common-Sensism

> λόγον σοφὸν ἐὰν ἀκούσῃ ἐπιστήμων αἰνέσει αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπ' αὐτὸν προσθήσει.
>
> If a man of understanding hears a wise word, he will praise it and add to it. (Sirach 21:15a)

Since the ancient world, Jews have frequently faced a double existential danger from their neighbors: the challenges, we might say, of Gentile *wisdom* and Gentile *swords*. Modern Jews in particular must come to terms with what Ochs calls "the two fires, metaphorically, of modernity and, literally, of the Shoa."[2] Jewish philosophy emerges in response to this double challenge to the intelligibility of Jewish life. Its primary task, as Ochs put it in an early essay, is to redirect "the dislocated Jew back to the speech community of Israel."[3] The Jewish philosopher can be a guide to the perplexed because she bears the perplexity of her people within herself. She participates in two traditions at once—the tradition of Israel, with its ultimate origin in the Torah, and the tradition of Western philosophy—and for this very reason, she tends to dwell at the margins of both.

It is characteristic of Ochs' pragmatism that he not only recognizes "influences" on his thought, but explicitly situates himself within both Jewish and Western philosophical traditions of inquiry and refers his thinking to problems that arise within these traditions. For this reason, Ochs' work frequently takes the form of *commentary,* clarifying or correcting the words of his teachers. The basic logic of commentary was aptly formulated by Jesus ben Sirach, himself a figure situated between Jewish wisdom and Greek philosophy, in the aphorism quoted above: the wise person *praises* the wise words she inherits (affirming their rational intelligibility) and then *adds* to them (clarifying their implications for her own time and place). To understand Ochs' pragmatism, then, we must begin with the traditions in dialogue with which his thought emerges.

1. Modern Jewish Philosophy

Like many of his contemporaries, the young Ochs identified himself with the critique of modern philosophy's tendency to erase Judaism's textual and civilizational resources launched by late nineteenth and early twentieth century Jewish thinkers including Hermann Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig,

2. Ochs, "Wounded Word," 155.
3. Ochs, "Torah, Language and Philosophy," 115.

and Martin Buber. Most noteworthy was their collective focus on the philosophical significance of the everyday linguistic practices of rabbinic Jews, in which these thinkers discerned an operative rationality that could not be adequately modeled in terms of modern logical systems. The "after-moderns," as Ochs calls them,

> perceived in the grammar of everyday practices, including the everyday practices of the traditional rabbinic Jew, certain norms of reasoning of which the logical systems of the modern philosophers provided no adequate model. These systems did not offer . . . adequate tools for identifying the rationality or rule-governed character of "sound common-sense" or of the hermeneutical, legal-ethical and liturgical practices of traditional Judaism.[4]

According to these thinkers, thinking happens in and through Jewish language. They discerned in Jewish linguistic practice implicit rational norms for how we speak to others, how we relate to the world, and how we speak to God. Thus Cohen, for example, sought to describe a "religion of reason" implicit in the "sources of Judaism."[5] So too Rosenzweig identified a "new thinking"[6] embodied in dialogical relations that unfold over time. In conversation with these aftermoderns, Ochs' early work offered a dialogical response to this new thinking in which Ochs discerned, "a critique and extension of Kant's transcendental philosophy that looks to us today like the foundations of a rabbinic semiotics."[7] Yet despite their attention to Jewish linguistic practices, Cohen, Rosenzweig, and Buber each retained residual elements of the modern philosophical approaches from which they sought to distance themselves and paid insufficient attention to the particulars of rabbinic linguistic practice and the context-specific character of their normative speech activity. In Ochs' view, aftermodern Jewish thought needed to develop a more ethnographic approach to language and "locate practices of speech-thinking in their social, or at least literary contexts."[8]

4. Ochs, "Scripture and Text," 219.

5. Cohen, *Religion of Reason*.

6. The term comes from Franz Rosenzweig, but it provides a useful description of the pragmatic approach shared by all three of these thinkers. See Rosenzweig, "New Thinking."

7. Ochs, "Rabbinic Semiotics," 35. This essay is reprinted, with slight modifications, as Ochs' discussion of "rabbinic pragmatism" in Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (hereafter cited as *PPLS*), 290–305.

8. Ochs, "Scripture and Text," 220.

The thinkers who, for Ochs, came closest to practicing this empirical recovery of rabbinic speech-thinking were not part of the canon of German Jewish thinkers, but rather two of his teachers at the Jewish Theological Seminary: Max Kadushin and David Weiss Halivni.[9] In Kadushin, Ochs found a thinker committed to providing a thick description of the logic of rabbinic thought exhibited by rabbinic texts. Rabbinic reading practices, Kadushin held, display and perform "value-concepts," the normative elements or units of a rabbinic *derash* or interpretation. As Ochs explains, Kadushin's value concepts have both "cognitive and valuational components."[10] This is because they are normative concepts that operate as hermeneutical rules to guide interpretive acts of text study and halakhic action. Throughout rabbinic literature one can find "haggadic statements" that display the outcomes of these interpretive acts and serve as evidence of the rabbis' use of value concepts to resolve interpretive questions. The rational potential of rabbinic hermeneutics lay, Kadushin argued, in the network of haggadic statements woven throughout rabbinic literature, since as Ochs puts it, "they imply the reason for the judgment they express."[11] These haggadic statements instantiate normative rules or value concepts that may be used to resolve other interpretive questions or problems. Since these rules are determined only in relation to particular cases, value-concepts are vague, their full meaning contingent upon their determination across a range of possible contexts. While value-concepts thus sustain a "drive" toward "concretization," they are "not tied to any particular manifestation. . . . [E]ach one of them suggests an identifiable, though not a definable idea or notion."[12] Value-concepts are not determinate propositions but "literary embodiments" that sponsor readers' open-ended but nonarbitrary deployment of them.

Kadushin's work was focused primarily on the relation between the Bible and the rabbinic logic it generated. Consequently, as Ochs has argued, Kadushin was "less attentive to the pragmatic force of rabbinic interpretation, or how it reformed rules of conduct in some particular community."[13] Ochs saw this problem as a product of the limits of Kadushin's method. In order to secure the objective validity of his thought, Kadushin tended to hypostasize value-concepts, abstracting them from the conditions of their ongoing use. But if interpretation, as Ochs has repeatedly maintained, is

9. Ochs has published volumes engaging in detail with both thinkers. See Ochs, *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind*; and Halivni, *Breaking the Tablets*.

10. Ochs, "Rabbinic Text-Process Theology," 148.

11. Ochs, "Rabbinic Text-Process Theology," 149.

12. Ochs, *Understanding the Rabbinic Mind*, 182.

13. Ochs, "Rabbinic Semiotics," 56.

a context-specific, historically conditioned activity, then value-concepts must function in relation to particular communities who use them to guide their interpretive judgments. Which value-concepts assume significance and in what systemic order depends upon the particular historical conditions of existing reading and speaking communities. What Ochs comes to call "rabbinic pragmatism" would seek not only to explicate the operative norms of rabbinic rationality, but also to offer an account of how these norms might be taken up to address the specific problems troubling particular Jewish communities.

If Kadushin modeled a pragmatic method for reconstructing rabbinic rationality, it was his teacher David Weiss Halivni who showed how to bring rabbinic rationality to bear on the defining catastrophe of modern Jewish life: the Shoah. For Halivni, a Talmud prodigy and a Holocaust survivor, the event of the Shoah is (in Ochs' words) "a condition of ultimate disruption that calls into question every level of Judaism, every Jewish habit of study, belief, and action in the world."[14] In theological terms, it constitutes a radical rupture in the covenant. Halivni's holocaust memoir *The Book and the Sword* begins with a midrash:

> The sword and the book came down from heaven tied to each other. Said the Almighty, "If you keep what is written in this book, you will be spared this sword; if not, you will be consumed by it" (Midrash Rabbah Deuteronomy 4:2). We clung to the book, yet we were consumed by the sword.[15]

As a sign of this rupture, Halivni describes how the relief he found through Torah study during the intensifying sufferings of his community in the ghetto of Sighet reached its limits in the concentration camps. "I had no desire or ability to study Torah amid people ready to kill us."[16]

Yet in the years that followed his liberation, Halivni charted a path forward that profoundly shaped Ochs' own response to the Holocaust. Halivni discerned in rabbinic sources a pattern of divine response to the traumas suffered by the Jews throughout their history in which communal restoration comes by way of the interpretive activities of the great sages. For Halivni, the prototype of this activity was the work of Ezra in the post-exilic Jewish community. Drawing on rabbinic traditions about Ezra's work of correcting the Torah,[17] Halivni argues that as a consequence of Israel's

14. Ochs, "Editor's Introduction," 47.

15. Halivni, *Book and the Sword*.

16. Halivni, *Book and the Sword*, 47.

17. B. San. 21b, Bemidbar Rabbah 3.12. See Halivni, *Peshat and Derash*, 136–46.

sin during the prophetic period, the post-exilic community found itself with a *maculate* text, a text wounded by textual errors and corruptions. As both prophet and scribe, Ezra repaired the text by making emendations (*tikkunot*) and by transmitting interpretive traditions that diverge from the plain sense, enabling the written text to continue to guide Israel after the exile. Halivni takes Ezra's correction of the written Torah as a prototype for his own scholarly labors, which use academic methods of study to repair the oral Torah, those living traditions of interpretation and practice that we might call the deep common sense of the rabbinic community. Halivni realizes that academic methods are necessary to this process, but deployed *for the sake of* healing the wounded community, what Ochs calls "pragmatic historiography."[18]

Underlying Halivni's proposal is the theological insight that the wounds of the Jewish community are intertwined with wounds afflicting its texts and interpretive traditions. The wounds of interpreters mirror the wounds of the text, with the surprising result (though a result at the heart of Jewish life) that the apparently impractical work of reinterpreting troubling texts can become the means by which the divine Word heals troubled readers. As Ochs describes this process,

> When I bring my suffering to the text of scripture, I notice its wounds, first; I am drawn to tend to them; and, only after being engaged in the work of "mending" them do I realize that my own wounds correspond to the text's and that the more deeply I care for the text's wounds, the more deeply my own wounds are healed.[19]

Scriptural revelation is the process by which God's Word heals his people through reparative scriptural reading—not by delivering a collection of clear propositions ("the meaning" of scripture) but by transforming the linguistic practices by which the community derives meaning from its scriptures, effecting what Ochs calls a "radical change in the relations that bind the words of a language together."[20] Ochs' scriptural pragmatism will offer a theory that explains how this process works.

18. Ochs, "Talmudic Scholarship," 120–43.
19. Ochs, "Bible's Wounded Authority," 117.
20. Ochs, "Talmudic Scholarship," 133.

2. Charles Peirce

As a Jewish *philosopher*, Ochs participates not only in the Jewish linguistic community but also in the tradition of Western philosophy. Inheriting the problems of modern philosophy, Ochs sought methods for internally critiquing modern philosophy that can also guide dislocated modern Jewish communities. It was through Max Kadushin that Ochs first encountered the work of Charles Peirce, the founder of pragmatism.[21] Over time, Ochs came to regard Peirce's pragmatism as one of the best instruments for articulating the rationality displayed in the classical sources of Judaism using the language of Western philosophy.

One of the core insights of pragmatism is that the locus of rationality is not consciousness but practice. According to Peirce, a belief is not primarily a mental entity, but rather a habit or rule of action, of which our self-consciousness is only a fallible sign.[22] Clarifying the content of our beliefs thus requires explicating their implications for practice, as expressed by Peirce's pragmatic maxim:

> Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object.[23]

For Peirce, a practicing laboratory scientist, this maxim implicitly guides the practice of modern science, for which concepts are only meaningful insofar as they have implications for a possible experiment.

Because practices are the locus of rationality, pragmatic inquiry, on Peirce's view, begins with problems that arise within our practices, registered to consciousness as doubt provoked by irritation or suffering. As Peirce says, "The irritation of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief. . . . With the doubt . . . the struggle begins, and with the cessation of

21. Kadushin spent many an afternoon strolling down Riverside Park rehearsing his knowledge of Charles Peirce's pragmatism. Ochs writes, "According to the biblical scholar and philosopher, Yohanan Muffs, Kadushin rarely referred to Peirce in writing, but I think you might like to know that Kadushin was a careful reader of Peirce's writings and talked of them at great length. We used to walk down Riverside Drive together [in the 1960s], coming home from the [Jewish Theological] Seminary. One of us would hold a volume of Peirce's *Collected Papers*, and we would discuss his philosophy in detail" (Ochs, "Rabbinic Text Process Theology," 155).

22. Peirce, *Collected Papers* (hereafter cited as *CP*), 5.397–402. See Ochs, *PPLS*, 194–95.

23. *CP* 5.402.

doubt it ends."[24] Pragmatic inquiry is guided by the problems that give rise to doubt, and on Peirce's view, it can have no purpose beyond the fixation of some new belief, some new rule of action according to which the problem that gave rise to doubt no longer arises. Ochs thus found in Peirce a model of inquiry as what Nicholas Adams has labeled *reparative reasoning*,[25] reasoning whose goal is the amelioration of the problematic conditions that stimulated it, prototypically the problematic condition of suffering.[26]

As inquiry into rationality, the central concern of Peirce's philosophy is *logic.* It is a symptom of our artificially narrow late-modern conceptions of rationality that for many readers the word "logic" denotes only the formal analysis of deductive reasoning in the tradition of Aristotelian syllogistic. Although Peirce made significant contributions to modern symbolic logic, his conception of logic also includes the *empirical* study of actual reasoning practices and normative questions about the relation of thinking to its objects, what Kant called *transcendental* logic.[27] On Peirce's view, the logical intuitions that serve as sources for formal logic are not insights into eternal laws of thought, but rather symptoms of deep beliefs, embodied in practices, that certain rules of reasoning prove reliable, and their validity extends only to those contexts in which they continue to prove reliable in practice.

Peirce's mature view was that logic in its broadest sense is identical to what he called "semiotic," the theory of signs.[28] Peirce's sophisticated semiotic theory provided Ochs with a set of analytic tools capable of making intelligible the rationality of Jewish practices. Unfortunately, Peirce's use of the term "semiotic" is as likely to mislead contemporary readers as the term "logic,"

24. *CP* 5.375.

25. Adams, "Reparative Reasoning." Ochs adopts this terminology in Ochs, "Reparative Reasoning."

26. This formulation is due in part to John Dewey. In his *Logic,* Dewey defines inquiry as "the directed or controlled transformation of an indeterminate situation into a determinately unified one" (117). When an indeterminate situation is clarified in the course of inquiry, it becomes a "problematic situation" (105).

27. For Ochs, what Kant calls "transcendental" reasoning in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a form of regressive reasoning that proceeds "from effect to possible cause" ("Reparative Reasoning," 195). Strictly speaking Kant distinguished the synthetic or "progressive" method of the first Critique, which constructs the possibility of human cognition out of its elements, from the analytic or "regressive" method he adopted in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics,* which takes cognition as a fact and reasons backwards to its conditions (*CP* 4.277; see Kant, *Prolegomena,* 73). Ochs' interpretation follows Hermann Cohen, who, taking Kant's account of his method in the *Prolegomena* as his paradigm, argued that transcendental reasoning proceeds regressively from existing scientific or other cultural practices to principles that account for their validity (*Kants Theorie der Erfahrung*, 66–79).

28. *CP* 2.227–29.

and for analogous reasons. Contemporary notions of semiotics, especially in the humanities, tend to derive from Saussure's account of the sign as a cultural unit of meaning, a conventional and arbitrary equivalence between a signifier and a signified. The Saussurean sign is a social entity, where "social" functions as the logical contrary of "natural."[29] By contrast, Peirce's identification of semiotics with logic inherits the classical tradition of semiotics as a theory of *inference.* On this view the paradigmatic sign is not linguistic meaning but rather material inference: if P then Q.[30] This is why Ochs describes the objects of Peircean semiotics as "rules of reasoning":

> *Peirce's theory of signs offers a set of conventions for diagramming any patterns or rules of reasoning.* Consider, for example, his conventions for diagramming semantic reference or signification. The fundamental unit of reference is the sign: a *signifier* that displays its *object* (reference or meaning) only with respect to a particular *interpretant* (context of meaning, interpretive mindset, or system of deep-seated rules).[31]

It is one of Peirce's core insights that the sign is irreducibly triadic—that is, that inferential reasoning is a relation involving at least three irreducible terms: that from which some inference may be drawn (the "signifier"), that about which one infers (the "object"), and those habits or practices of reasoning by means of which this inference may be drawn and which are themselves affected in the process of reasoning (the "interpretant"). Unlike the Saussurean sign, these embodied habits of inference in relation to which signs operate are not "social" *in opposition to* "natural" because they emerge from the biological dimension of human life. Animals communicate and draw inferences, and these natural capacities are continuous with the sorts of inferential reasoning that function within human social practices like language and scientific inquiry.[32] Moreover, because these practices are formed diachronically through interaction with the empirical world, signs are not intrinsically arbitrary, though they may become arbitrary in limit cases when they lose their capacity for self-correction. Peirce's semiotic

29. Saussure says that the association is "unmotivated, i.e. arbitrary in that [the signifier] actually has no natural connection with the signified" (Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 69).

30. See Eco, *Semiotics*, 14–45, esp. 39–45. For classical semiotics, see Manetti, *Theories of the Sign*.

31. Ochs, "Reparative Reasoning," 190–91.

32. As Dewey says, "Intellectual operations are foreshadowed in behavior of the biological kind, and the latter prepares the way for the former" (*Logic*, 43).

theory thus shows how a community's linguistic practices can embody relatively reliable rules of reasoning.

II. Beyond Common Sense

וְלֹא הַמִּדְרָשׁ הוּא הָעִקָּר, אֶלָּא הַמַּעֲשֶׂה.

> The fundamental thing is not interpretation but action.
> (Pirkei Avot 1:17)

While Peirce aimed primarily to correct modern philosophy in light of the scientific method, his core insight that rationality is practical is not new. William James famously called pragmatism "a new name for some old ways of thinking," identifying Socrates and Aristotle as ancient forerunners.[33] Peirce himself framed the pragmatic maxim as commentary on the words of the rabbi of Nazareth, calling it "an application of the sole principle of logic which was recommended by Jesus; 'Ye may know them by their fruits,'" and adding that "it is very intimately allied with the ideas of the gospel."[34] Ochs takes Peirce's remark as an important clue that pragmatism recapitulates the practical orientation of the scriptural wisdom tradition that Jesus' aphorism so aptly summarizes.[35] Pragmatic thinking also shapes the rabbinic wisdom tradition, as with Shimon ben Gamaliel's aphorism above, in which we might hear another echo of the pragmatic maxim: it is not interpretation (merely verbal clarification), but action (lived practice), that gets to the root of a matter.

Ochs' thought deepens pragmatism by recalling it to its scriptural roots. His *magnum opus*, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture,* is a reparative account of Peirce's own intellectual development as a process of pragmatic inquiry, culminating in Peirce's post-1905 reformulation of his philosophy as a "critical common-sensism" that identifies indubitable rules of reasoning in common sense beliefs implicit in everyday practices.[36] Ochs frames his own "scriptural pragmatism" as commentary on Peirce's critical common-sensism, clarifying (as Peirce does not) how common sense itself may be repaired by God's Word through scripture during times of crisis. Scriptural pragmatism is the form critical common-sensism takes in light of scriptural communities' recurring experience of possibilities of healing

33. James, *Pragmatism*, 50.

34. CP 5.402 n.2. See also CP 5.464–6.

35. PPLS, 323–5. Cf. PPLS 9, where Ochs draws a parallel between pragmatic writing and wisdom literature.

36. CP 5.439–52.

and repair that transcend human capacities. It is, we might say, an account of how human wisdom can be healed by divine wisdom.

1. Critical Common-Sensism

Peirce calls his late pragmatism "critical common-sensism" to identify an affinity between his response to Cartesian skepticism and that of the Scottish common sense philosophers. Provoked by the massive social and intellectual upheavals of early modern Europe, Descartes argued that modern philosophy must begin anew by adopting a method of systematically doubting every belief in order to discover secure first principles that cannot be doubted. He thought he had discovered such principles in beliefs that are clear and distinct to the individual thinker (the *cogito*). According to Ochs, however, by failing to analyze the contextual conditions that gave rise to his doubt, Descartes misinterpreted his doubt as a universal problem afflicting human beings in general. As a result, Descartes sought to resolve his doubt by identifying clear conditions grounding all human knowing. By taking the generality and clarity of the theoretical sciences as the paradigm of philosophical repair, Descartes sought his foundational principles in concepts whose truth is purportedly guaranteed by their clarity and distinctness for any rational mind. Ochs argues that this foundationalist strategy fails to resolve adequately the real doubts that animate its inquiry, generating instead either dogmatic philosophical systems that tacitly place obstacles in the course of inquiry or skeptical misologies that abandon confidence in rational inquiry altogether.

Common sensists like Thomas Reid sought to repair Cartesian philosophy by grounding knowledge in first principles "common to philosophers and to the vulgar."[37] These principles would be instinctive beliefs given by nature along with our other faculties,[38] rather than principles—like Locke's simple ideas or Leibniz's principle of contradiction—whose supposed self-evidence is clear only to philosophers.[39] By attempting to ground all human knowledge in a set of universally evident beliefs, Scottish common sensism undoubtedly reiterated Cartesian foundationalism; but in its insistence that the philosopher's doubt must be answered by

37. Reid, *Essays*, 16.

38. See CP 5.439ff.

39. For example, Reid includes principles like "the existence of everything of which I am conscious" (*Essays*, 328) and "that we have some degree of power over our actions" (*Essays*, 334).

appeal to principles implicit in everyday practice and ordinary language, it anticipated a core insight of pragmatism.

Since the philosopher may find her community's common-sense rules operative within ordinary linguistic practices, a characteristic tendency of common sensism is to approach language as a potential source of rationality rather than as mere subjective opinion or social convention. There is a logic to our living linguistic practices, a Socratic intuition that pragmatists share with Wittgenstein and the ordinary language philosophers. Part of the common sense philosopher's task is thus explicative, or in Ochs' language, diagrammatic. She must introduce context-specific clarity to deep rules of common sense in order to correct particular philosophical problems. Peirce's pragmatic maxim exemplifies this process. Aphorisms like "the proof is in the pudding" or "by their fruits ye shall know them" express a common sense belief with a great deal of vagueness. Peirce's various formulations of the pragmatic maxim explicate this belief by introducing further clarity relevant to the particular failures of modern philosophy.

Ochs argues that one reason modern philosophers have struggled to extricate themselves from Descartes' mode of thinking is the difficulty involved in understanding how a tradition of inquiry can correct its own deepest norms and commitments. It seems that one must "both affirm and criticize his own method of reasoning,"[40] and it is difficult to see how this is possible without asserting (as Descartes did) that some of one's existing normative commitments are beyond the possibility of rational criticism. Peirce resolved this problem by arguing that the deepest corrective principles to which we appeal are different in kind from the rules of reasoning they correct. The rules of reasoning that govern everyday life are frequently used but very liable to error. Peirce called these "B-reasonings." When a B-reasoning fails, stimulating a doubt, we do not correct it by appeal to a rule of the same order. Rather, we appeal to rules embodying deeper convictions that are rarely useful, but highly reliable when applicable. Peirce called these deeper principles "A-reasonings." The activity of self-correction may then be understood as the use of a deeper A-reasoning to correct some errant B-reasoning.

As Ochs points out, the notion of reasonings of different depths can be iterated: a deeper corrective rule may itself be in need of correction, and so on. In iterating Peirce's model, Ochs transforms his distinction between B- and A- reasonings into a distinction between what we might call *finite* and *infinite* reasonings. A finite (B-) reasoning is one that "diagrams and corrects

40. PPLS 259.

another such B-reasoning."[41] Such reasoning is stimulated by a problem in another reasoning, of which it provides some map or analysis (a "diagram") and recommends an action or habit change to alleviate the problem (a "correction"). These reasonings are finite because they are stimulated by a finite class of problems whose resolution is the criterion of its success and which come to an end when the problem that stimulated them is resolved. Because B-reasonings are corrected by other B-reasonings, they can be organized hierarchically in an ordered series of corrective reasonings of increasing depth. The intuitive reasonings we use to solve problems that arise in everyday life are finite (B-) reasonings in this sense, but so are the reasonings that guide doctors and engineers, medical researchers, and physicists.

By combining this hierarchical model of reparative rationality with Peirce's architectonic classification of the sciences[42] and Dewey's pragmatic analysis of social institutions,[43] Ochs arrives at an account of reparative reasoning as a social activity occurring within hierarchically ordered institutions of repair.

> We might conceive of social institutions as if they were progressively ordered to serve the relative ends of repairing suffering, then of repairing the repair of suffering, and so on. Say we start with the *Lebenswelt,* or the world of everyday practices that includes not only doing this or that but also repairing how one does this or that. A doorknob won't open, so I oil it. Then I scratch myself, so I put on a Band-Aid.[44]

When finite rules of reasoning like "if you scratch yourself, apply a Band-Aid" prove insufficient—if the wound is too deep, for example—then we may seek repair through what Ochs calls "practical arts" practiced in "service institutions" like hospitals, mechanics, and churches, which operationalize higher-order rules of repair. These institutions in turn may lack the capacity to resolve our problem—the doctors may not know how to cure an ailment, the priest may find herself at a loss for words. In these cases, we may develop higher-order practices to repair the repairers, which Ochs calls "theoretical sciences" or "reparative sciences," such as those practiced in research institutions like the modern academy. But these institutions may themselves fail to address the problems of the

41. PPLS 263.

42. PPLS 264, where Ochs refers to Peirce's "A Detailed Classification of the Sciences" (CP 1.203–83).

43. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 11. Ochs may have in mind texts like Dewey, *Reconstruction,* 187–216; and Dewey, *Liberalism*.

44. Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 11. See the longer treatment in PPLS 263–68.

practical sciences they serve. It is the task of the philosopher to analyze and repair ("diagram-and-correct") theoretical sciences.[45]

We may think of Cartesian doubt as a symptom of a crisis threatening the philosopher's ability to perform her reparative function. Ochs suggests that Descartes suffered from an *infinite doubt*—doubt not about a particular finite rule of reasoning (that might be repaired by another, deeper but still finite rule of reasoning), but rather about an entire infinite series of B-reasonings. Infinite doubt is, for Ochs, a philosophical performance of the logic appropriate to historical moments when one's world comes crashing down and nothing seems intelligible. Despite his critique of Descartes, Ochs does not reject the validity of infinite doubt; indeed, he can say that, "like Descartes, pragmatic logicians are motivated by infinite doubt."[46] But pragmatists reinterpret this doubt as a symptom of a deep problem that arises in a particular context rather than as a universal problem facing human beings as such. Descartes' problem is that by correcting his doubt by appealing to clear and distinct (hence, finite) principles, he makes a kind of category error, "failing to note that the doubt one has about any particular B-reasoning must be of a different kind than the doubt one might have of all B-reasonings."[47] By treating philosophical reasoning as grounded in finite principles, whether on the model of practical or theoretical sciences, modern philosophers tend, like Descartes, to apply finite rules appropriate for repairing a specific problem as though they were relevant to every problem.

For the pragmatist, however, an infinite doubt requires an infinite reasoning to repair it, a reasoning capable of repairing an entire problematic chain of corrective reasonings. Ochs identifies these infinite reasonings with Peirce's A-reasonings.[48] Infinite reasonings avoid the Cartesian tendency towards either dogmatic arbitrariness or skeptical misology because they differ in two important ways from Descartes' first principles. First, Cartesian first principles are supposed to be self-evident, and hence immune to any possible doubt. Pragmatic infinite reasonings are, by contrast, indubitable beliefs in the more modest sense that one cannot bring oneself to doubt them in one's actual conduct. They are immune not to any possible doubt but to any *actual* doubt. As Ochs comments,

> The difference lies in the etiology of the two sets of indubitables and, thus, in their empirical import. A priorists [such as Cartesian foundationalists] arrive at their acritical beliefs by tracing a

45. PPLS 267.
46. PPLS 266.
47. PPLS 263.
48. PPLS 263.

> series of *imagined* doubts to a finite limit. . . . Pragmaticists [i.e. critical common sensists], on the other hand, would arrive at their indubitables by tracing a series of *actual* doubts to a finite limit. . . . This difference is revealed only in *practice:* indubitable beliefs are successfully tested and refined against everyday experience; a priori beliefs show themselves, in the long run, to be empirically untestable.[49]

In this respect, the logical difference between a Cartesian and a pragmatist emerges only diachronically. Viewed synchronically, the beliefs of a critical common-sensist share the same hierarchical structure and indubitable basis as a foundationalist system. But while the Cartesian understands her first principles as self-evident to any human being, the indubitable beliefs of a pragmatist are formed through a temporal process of corrective reasoning—for Peirce, not only a socio-historical process but also a biological evolutionary one—and they may in principle be called into question in the future. Pragmatic ultimate commitments prove themselves indubitable practically, by their history of reliably resolving actual doubts and emerging unscathed from criticism.

Second, indubitable beliefs are *irremediably vague.* An irremediably vague belief is one that guides action, yet whose consequences for action in particular cases cannot be fully determined prior to the occasions in which action is required.[50] Infinite reasonings must be vague in this sense, Ochs argues, because they make reference to an infinite series that cannot be determined fully by some finite rule. One must avoid clarifying irremediably vague beliefs prematurely, since doing so would amount to making rash prejudgments about cases without adequate reason. Ochs follows Peirce in arguing that one of the most egregious errors of modern philosophy has been to neglect vagueness as a distinct logical mode alongside individuality and generality and then to regard nonvagueness (clarity and distinctness) as a sign of truth. Indeed, the opposite is more nearly the case. Because the consequences of a clear idea are more precisely determined, it is far more fallible and dubitable than a vague idea. This is why clarifying the implications of a hypothesis is an important step in submitting it to empirical verification. A vague idea is harder to disprove precisely because it determines less.

Indubitability and irremediable vagueness are also characteristic features of our deepest common sense beliefs in contrast to claims generated through more precise technical discourses. This is why the pragmatic philosopher

49. PPLS 170.

50. PPLS 47–48.

performs her most radical reparative task not by drawing on clear principles evident to philosophers, but rather by appealing to deep rules of common sense implicit in everyday practice—rules such as the pragmatic maxim itself. By doing so, the pragmatic philosopher returns the sciences to the problems of everyday life that stimulated their inquiry in the first place.

2. Scriptural Pragmatism

For the common-sense pragmatist, there is always already some rule implicit in a community's everyday practices that may be brought to bear for the repair of some philosophical problem; it is simply a matter of unearthing it. This reparative appeal to common sense may take the form of a relatively confident reappropriation of deep resources already present within a particular tradition; but it may also take increasingly radical forms.[51] Through mathematics, the science of the possible that, according to Peirce, "posits hypotheses, and traces out their consequences,"[52] human beings explore the internal possibilities of common sense in a controlled and systematic way, often hitting upon hitherto neglected concepts and relations. Through playful or anarchic practices like art, poetry, or musement, human beings open their minds to generative wells of creative possibility immanent in the created order. Such practices may even take on a "religious" character, but in Ochs' framework they remain within the bounds of a kind of natural theology or immanent Logos philosophy, and hence within the broadest sphere of possibilities available to common-sense philosophers.

The need for a specifically *scriptural* pragmatism arises for those who believe that communities may face situations so traumatic they challenge even their most fundamental beliefs, so catastrophic that no rule of common sense, no traditional wisdom, and no insight of human rationality, however radical, provides an adequate response. In these situations, Ochs says,

> the world itself may be brought into question. The world of experience is served by a finite set of common-sense beliefs, and

51. In *Peirce, Pragmatism, and the Logic of Scripture*, the practice Peirce calls "Musement" exemplifies for Ochs the most radical appeal to common sense, generating "three part dialogues among mathematical imagination . . . logical criticism . . . and elemental habits of common sense . . ." (PPLS 318–19). Later, speaking with reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, Ochs refers to common-sense philosophers as potential "'seers' (muses and visionaries)" (PPLS 322). In *Another Reformation*, by contrast, Ochs operates with a somewhat narrower conception of common sense, so that he can say that philosophers adopt practices like "mathematics, art, and prophecy" when common sense fails them (Ochs, *Another Reformation*, 12).

52. CP 1.240.

> there are terrible occasions when this world breaks down and common sense is confounded.[53]

For modern Jews, the Shoah is a civilizational crisis of this magnitude. The tragedy of the Shoah is not only the unspeakable destruction of innocent human life but also its challenge to the intelligibility of Jewish tradition. As for most Jewish thinkers of his generation, the Shoah casts a dark and heavy shadow over Ochs' thought. Ochs' response is to seek communal restoration in the God of Israel, a source of repair deeper than common sense (though one to which Jewish faith acquired through millennia of experience bears witness). "There is more than *this* world, however," Ochs insists; "for scriptural pragmatists, there are resources *out* of this world for correcting the inadequacies *of* this world."[54]

Scriptural pragmatists are common sense philosophers—not only Jews, but also Christians, Muslims, and others—who believe that such radical crises may occur and that divine help may come through a certain kind of appeal to scripture. This reparative use of scripture differs from its function during what we might call "ordinary times," when a community remains relatively confident in the adequacy of its common sense as embodied in its traditions, doctrines, and linguistic practices. The scriptures are, of course, always integral to the life of scriptural communities as objects of study, scripts for prayer, or guides for action. But during ordinary times, a scriptural community interprets its scriptures in tradition-bound ways that accord with its common sense commitments. Members of such communities tend to experience the meanings of their most important texts as plain or obvious, but this intuitive sense of scripture's clarity reflects their implicit confidence in the general reliability of the communal linguistic rules by which they interpret scripture.

For just this reason, however, scripture cannot deliver new reparative rules directly, through its plain sense. "The Bible is *not*," Ochs says, "a source of alternative common sense. . . . The Bible's plain sense guides everyday practice only when it reinforces common sense (however much that common sense has been reshaped by previous biblical legislations)."[55] To appeal directly to the scriptures in what we might call "extraordinary times" of crisis is to reproduce Descartes' error of assuming that ultimate reparative rules should be both indubitable and clear. This characteristically modern strategy ends up foreclosing the more radical kinds of repair that

53. PPLS 319.
54. PPLS 319.
55. PPLS 320.

are needful in just those circumstances, reiterating rather than repairing the community's broken linguistic practices.

An infinite rule of repair that could correct a community's deepest common-sense rules of reasoning must come not by way of the plain sense of scripture but rather by the *disruption* of its plain meaning. In times of crisis, language fails; the community comes to doubt not only that it knows what to say on this or that occasion, but also the adequacy of its deepest, hitherto indubitable commitments. Scripture's sense for such communities becomes troubled. And just as the "maculate" text Ezra corrected was a symbol of the wounds of the post-exilic Jewish community, so the troubled sense of scripture is a mirror of the breakdown in a community's language and a symptom of its sufferings. Paradoxically, however, it is just this experience of alienation from scripture's plain meaning that manifests the community's need to return to scripture. While it is logically possible to conclude that the scriptures have exhausted their usefulness, the scriptural pragmatist continues to read in faith that the scriptures may yet again deliver life:

> . . . as the process of reading continues, the very text that gave rise to the discomfort also gives rise to an unexpected sense that, while as yet inapparent, a solution is already available. . . . The reader is moved by an odd sense that repairing this discomfort will require finding the right repair-person ("redeemer") as much as it will require conceiving the right repair.[56]

In a manner specific to each crisis, the divine Word delivers new reparative rules to the troubled community. In keeping with the reparative logic outlined above, only an infinite rule (an A-reasoning) could repair the infinite doubt that afflicts a community in times of crisis. Such a rule, we have seen, must be indubitable (able to bring doubt to an end) but also highly vague about its determinate meaning in particular contexts. In practice, while as an *indubitable* word scriptural communities may be sure of having received something beyond their own rational capacities, as a *vague* word it remains the fallible work of finite human beings to clarify its full meaning—its practical implications in particular contexts. The divine Word really speaks, but not apart from human interpreters.

Change is, of course, implicit in the notion of repair. The infinite process of repair in times of crisis might be compared to conversion, or to a Kuhnian paradigm shift.[57] It is salutary to recall how different was ancient Israelite religion from the Judaism that emerged after the Babylonian exile. While one

56. PPLS 319.

57. As Ochs says, "Within the academic disciplines, these failings are analogous to the epistemological crises that stimulate what Thomas Kuhn labeled scientific 'paradigm shifts'" (Ochs, *Another Reformation,* 12).

can say that scriptural pragmatism is continuous with the common sense norms of the rabbinic tradition itself, which preserves the memory of these reparative encounters with God, there are no guarantees that a tradition after a crisis will retain its identity according to standards that seemed decisive prior to the crisis. Divine repair is, as Ochs said in his 2015 Cambridge lectures, a radical transformation that can lead to “the reappearance of the community in another form,”[58] an event akin to death and resurrection, to the Spirit bringing life to a valley of dry bones.

III. Practices of Wisdom

דְּרָכֶיהָ דַרְכֵי-נֹעַם וְכָל-נְתִיבוֹתֶיהָ שָׁלוֹם.

> Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.
> (Prov 3:17)

The meaning of Ochs’ pragmatism is inseparable from practice. It is not that pragmatism has practical *applications*, a term which implies (unpragmatically) that thinking proceeds from theory to practice. Rather, for the pragmatist even the conceptual content of pragmatism remains vague apart from the practices in which it is concretized. For this reason, an account of Ochs’ pragmatism must also be an account of the practices and institutions he has labored to bring into being.

Wisdom leads to life, as already adumbrated in the book of Proverbs: individual life experienced as *pleasure* and communal life experienced as *peace*. It is fitting that Ochs is most identified with the practices of Textual Reasoning and Scriptural Reasoning, in which the joy of studying scripture together overflow into unexpected friendships across difference (peace in microcosm). Scriptural Reasoning in particular, which uniquely exemplifies the distinctive logic of scriptural pragmatism, becomes the prototype for Ochs’ other practical interventions, such as the Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice program at the University of Virginia and his Hearth to Hearth peacebuilding work. These practices exhibit the inextricable link between the pursuit of wisdom and ethical life, between Torah study and acts of loving-kindness (*gemilut hesadim*), that lies at the heart of Ochs’ philosophical vision.

58. Ochs, “Lecture Handout 4.”

1. Textual Reasoning and Scriptural Reasoning

Textual Reasoning (TR) emerged in the 1980s from conversations among Jewish philosophers disappointed by the failure of modern Western philosophy to provide principles of inquiry capable of addressing the pressing concerns of living Jewish communities.[59] These philosophers developed a novel practice of Jewish text study rooted in the Jewish textual tradition itself which they aspired to activate as a source of communal repair. Textual Reasoning brought text scholars familiar with rabbinic reading practices together with Jewish philosophers skilled in illuminating logics of reading and reasoning.

Throughout the 1990s, Textual Reasoners joined together in an online chat forum to study rabbinic texts and discuss critical issues affecting Jewish communities. In his own account of these often charged exchanges, Ochs has noted how frequently they motivated participants to exercise and display their own rational commitments and identify rules of reasoning shared with others in order to facilitate communal problem-solving. In an essay entitled, "Scripture and Text," Ochs explains that

> TR practices emerge out of modest-sized fellowships of rabbinic text study and of scriptural text study. . . . TR neither eschews its capacity to frame a *ratio* . . . nor presumes that its first principles . . . are self-evident, self-justified, or of universal import. The minimal requirements for such principles are that they emerge out of disciplined readings of rabbinic and scriptural sources that are applicable to the project at hand, and that they are refined as needed in the process of inquiry.[60]

More often than not, Ochs observed, identification of shared rules emerged in the course of conversational appeals to rabbinic texts such that Textual Reasoning conversations could provide limited evidence of the pragmatic benefit of intra-Judaic communal text study.

Textual Reasoning gave birth to Scriptural Reasoning (SR) as early Textual Reasoners developed friendships with Christian and Muslim scholars and began to experiment with reading scripture together. If any single practice exemplifies Ochs' recourse to scriptural wisdom as a source of life, it is surely this practice of Scriptural Reasoning.[61] According to Ochs,

59. See Ochs, "Behind the Mechitsa." For other accounts of TR, see the other essays in the same issue of the *Journal of Textual Reasoning* and the essays in Ochs and Levene, *Textual Reasonings*.

60. Ochs, "Scripture and Text," 197.

61. Many scholars have offered theoretical accounts of SR. See Pecknold and Ford, *Promise*; Adams, *Habermas,* 234–55; Higton and Muers, *Text in Play*; and the essays by

> Beginning in 1994, a group of scholars of Islam, Judaism, and Christianity joined together to discover a way to conduct dialogue across the borders of these three Abrahamic scriptural traditions. Our goal was not to generate a theory of dialogue and then apply the theory to form a new practice, but to experiment with many practices of study until we discovered the best method for "studying across difference." Our theory of SR would then emerge from out of our descriptions and analyses of SR practice. We met for five years of biannual study until we discovered and refined the best method, which we called "Scriptural Reasoning" (SR).[62]

Over time Ochs has come to distinguish what he calls "Formational SR" from a wider network of SR practices that would apply SR's reparative rationality in various institutional contexts.[63] For the most part, this network remains hypothetical, a proposal about how the SR community should develop in the future. We focus here on Formational SR because it resources these other SR practices and exemplifies their underlying logic.

Formational SR is the familiar practice of interfaith text study,

> symbolized by study around a small table, with three or more chairs, one small selection from each of the three Abrahamic scriptural canons, and three or more persons of any age eager to enter into a conversational fellowship with one another and, as it were, with these three text selections.[64]

While one might certainly call SR a practice of "interreligious dialogue,"[65] Ochs tends to resist the inference that its primary purpose is "interreligious understanding or peacebuilding."[66] There are at least two reasons for this. First, Ochs tends to understand SR's basic reparative function as primarily a *logical* repair of modern academic practices. The "original purpose" of its founders, he says, was a desire to repair "inadequate academic methods for teaching scripture and scripturally-based religions."[67] Second, while the

Mark Randall James, Randi Rashkover, and Daniel Weiss in *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 16, no. 1 (June 2017). See now Ochs, *Religion without Violence,* which appeared too late for us to make use of here.

62. Ochs, "Introduction to Scriptural Reasoning," 16–22.

63. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 210–18.

64. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 207.

65. Ochs discusses SR as a practice of inter-religious dialogue in Ochs, "Possibilities and Limits," 488–515.

66. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 205.

67. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 205.

pursuit of peace and understanding may motivate people to participate in SR, they are not *internal* norms of SR as a practice. That is, one need not intend to seek peace in order to participate in SR. Rather, Ochs frames SR as a way of inviting people to share their affection for their scriptures by studying in the rabbinic spirit of study *l'shma,* "for its own sake" or "for God's sake." SR is akin to what Peirce calls Musement, "a lively exercise of one's powers [that] . . . has no rules except this very law of liberty."[68] This is not the spirit in which we actually repair things, though it is the spirit in which we imagine possibilities that might later be useful for reparative purposes.

There is risk involved in studying *l'shma* because of what Scott Appleby calls "the ambivalence of the sacred."[69] The same sacredness and life that rewards *l'shma* study can also be the cause of absolutism and violence when a community feels under threat. Scripture is *powerful*: "Is not my word like fire, says the Lord?" (Jer 23:29). The same fire that warms and gives life can also kill and destroy. Ochs discerns that the impulse to guard the sacredness of scripture, even violently, is often an index of the community's *love* of their sacred scriptures as a primal source of divine life.[70] Rather than unleashing the destroying fire of scriptural passion, SR is a practice of offering a measure of scripture's warmth to others.

Sharing this affection for scripture may have a contagious effect, as the warmth displayed by one participant may tempt another to reveal warmth of her own. The result is often "unexpected friendships across the borders of religious traditions."[71] In this way, interreligious friendship is another possible outcome of SR practice. This in turn often leads to a third kind of outcome: the discovery of new meanings or insights.

> With inhibitions reduced by the friendships, participants often voice cognitive and affective responses that they would not usually share in such settings: responses to words and verse in their "own" scriptures as well as those of the others. The exchange of responses stimulates further responses, resulting . . . in insights and readings they had not previously considered.[72]

The result is not usually generalizations about "what Christians believe" or "the nature of Islam," let alone novel interpretations of a religious tradition as a whole. Rather, SR illuminates something much narrower: "mere words

68. CP 6.458.
69. Appleby, *Ambivalence of the Sacred*.
70. Ochs, "Possibilities and Limits," 489.
71. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 207.
72. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 207.

and verses"[73] of scripture, and the small handful of individual religious people with whom one is studying.

Over time, however, discovering new possibilities within one's own scriptures can effect a subtle cognitive shift in perception.

> Participants will usually affirm the beliefs they came in with. *They will not, however, define their belief as the only legitimate one in their religion.* They may still regard others who do not share their belief as somewhat weak and in need of teaching. But their attitude toward these others will lack the all- or-nothing judgments they may have brought to the SR study: that those who do not share their beliefs represent intolerable threats to their beliefs. We believe this to be the only change that is necessary to transform the conditions for violent disagreement (where A is true, B is false, and there are no other possible options) into conditions for nonviolent disagreement (where A is true and several other options are less true).[74]

Nonviolent disagreement remains real disagreement. To affirm truth by degrees (A is more true than B) is not equivalent to the sort of relativism ("all religions are true," "all religions are equally valid") that in its own way precludes genuine disagreement as much as the binary assumption that the truth of one's own position entails the falsity of everyone else's. Yet the sort of disagreement cultivated in SR is genuinely nonviolent because, as Ochs says, to affirm

> that scripture tolerates, say, two meanings of a crucial verse, and not only one, is already to soften the rage that such participants may feel toward those whose readings differ from theirs. In place of rage, such participants may adopt, for example, a superior and patronizing—but nonviolent—attitude toward these others as errant, but guilty only of a weaker reading of scripture rather than a reading that defies the very truth of things.[75]

The consequences of these discoveries can be paradoxical. On the one hand, SR is friendly to religious tradition and traditionalists. It does not impose a modernist liberal ethos on participants; it bears a family resemblance to traditional scripture study practices; and by not proposing new readings of the tradition *per se*, it seems to leave the traditions more or less untouched. On the other hand, if scripture is to deliver a corrective rule to a community's

73. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 207.

74. Ochs, "Possibilities and Limits," 494.

75. Ochs, "Possibilities and Limits," 496.

common sense in time of crisis, as Ochs hopes, it might take just this form: a new or strange interpretation, available in the scriptures but not consistent with what the community currently takes for granted. Such interpretations offered in a playful spirit need not directly challenge the tradition, but they may, if taken up as hypotheses, lead to change *in the long run*. Thus even when SR is directly practiced for its own sake, it may have an indirect reparative function.[76] This is one reason Ochs insists that SR's capacity to repair is "fully displayed only in social networks of Scriptural Reasoning and may be visible in Foundational Scriptural Reasoning only for those who have seen how it works across a whole network."[77]

2. Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice

One context in which the fruits of SR have been displayed is the community of scholars at the University of Virginia called the Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice (SIP) program. This graduate program, founded and directed by Ochs, represents his most concrete attempt to enact the reparative logic of SR institutionally in the modern academy. SIP takes seriously the fact that "scriptures are literatures that generate communities of religious practice: practices of study, of interpretation and reflection, of ritual, and of social life."[78]

The SIP program cultivates academic inquiry that does justice to both the common sense and scriptural dimensions of Ochs' pragmatism. It displays its common sensism by inviting graduate students to seek the rationality of religious traditions in their embodied communal practices. They tend to approach religious texts primarily as snapshots of an ongoing communal conversation whose full significance only emerges in relation to their effects on the living process from which they are abstracted. SIP enacts scriptural pragmatism by inviting students to ask how the ongoing life of scriptural communities is in some sense generated by their scriptures. Whether they are offering empirical descriptions or normative interventions in a religious community, SIP students tend to understand scripture and its interpretation as integral parts of the scholarly task. Hence the three "pillars" of SIP: scripture, interpretation, and practice. Through disciplines like ethnography and orality theory, they examine the lived *practices* of religious communities that embody their common sense. Through disciplines like hermeneutics,

76. This is a familiar paradox for those within scriptural religions, which often make the blessings of finite life consequent upon the pursuit of God for His own sake, without concern for those blessings. "Seek first the kingdom of God, and all these things will be added to you as well" (Matt 6:33).

77. Ochs, "Re-socializing Scholars," 207.

78. "Comparative Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice."

philosophy of language, and logic, they describe the operative rationality of those communities, especially as it takes the form of *interpretation*. Finally, through modern Biblical and Qur'anic scholarship guided by the example of traditional interpreters, they study *scripture* in its history of interpretation for the sake of its possible reparative potential.

Methodologically the SIP program might be called (to borrow an Ochsian phrase) "doubly dialogic."[79] It is dialogic first in its distinctive interdisciplinarity that attempts to set objectivist (or neutral) and subjectivist (or self-referential) modes of modern scholarship into a fruitful relation. Steven Fraade's rabbinic scholarship may serve as a prototype.[80] In Ochs' account of Fraade's work,

> His method is to find *within [rabbinic] texts* a mode of inquiry that, when reappropriated within the context of modern scholarship, would enable that scholarship to reclaim the dimension of textual meaning it had lost. His method is thus dialogic—in his terms, a "shuttling back and forth" between modern and ancient discourses in order to recover both the overlooked meaning of rabbinic literature *and* the appropriate method for disclosing it. He calls this the method of *commentary* and sets out both to *describe* rabbinic scriptural commentary *and* to *perform* his new variety of modern scholarly commentary.[81]

To understand the ongoing process of text study that transforms the rabbinic student and to which rabbinic texts bear witness, the modern scholar must approach these texts both as a historian examining "how rabbinic redactors integrated various traditions into running commentaries" and at the same time "as if they were its intended students, thereby achieving some understanding of its performative method and force."[82] To apprehend a performance in its performativity requires the scholar to reiterate this performance herself. SIP students tend to approach other texts in a similar way, seeking both to describe from outside and to participate from within the material they study.

SIP is dialogic in a second way as well: SIP students tend to participate in modes of interreligious dialogue analogous to Scriptural Reasoning. As in SR, SIP students are not required to "bracket" their individual religious

79. Ochs, *Return to Scripture*, 27.

80. We have not chosen Fraade at random. His work has had an especially substantial influence on SIP as mediated through one of his students, Elizabeth Shanks Alexander, who also teaches in the SIP program.

81. Ochs, *Return to Scripture*, 24.

82. Ochs, *Return to Scripture*, 26–27.

commitments, but nor do these commitments determine the results of inquiry *a priori*. Instead, students bring with them both the wounds of their communities and the deep common sense and scriptural wisdom from which reparative reasoning in scriptural traditions tends to emerge. The result is often like the playful thinking that takes place in SR, but now situated in the academy where it can be brought to bear with precision to address specific problems.

The SIP program does not signify a general critique of academic methods of inquiry. This kind of critique (a frequent "postmodern" move) would simply repeat the modern binaristic logic of modernity that needs repair. Conventional academic methods of study are often the appropriate methods to use, particularly with reference to communities whose rules are relatively untroubled. The danger lies in attempting to use these methods beyond their appropriate limits, or worse, with a self-understanding of these disciplines that denies in principle that such limits exist. Modern or post-modern scholars who are animated by deep civilizational crises but trained in academic disciplines sometimes try to use the language and logic of their disciplines to *directly* address the crisis that animates them. Such scholars confuse the clear urgency that animates their quest for repair with the conventional clarity of their academic discipline, and consequently, their language remains determined by a logic of suffering. Discourse capable of repairing deep problems must instead be vague—sufficiently determined by existing conventions to be intelligible, but sufficiently open and indeterminate as to make available a genuinely new possibility. These deepest sources of repair cannot correct everyday life directly, which would reduce them to fallible finite practices. Rather, they must operate indirectly by repairing *philosophical* and *academic* practices, redirecting them to their proper reparative task.

The SIP program is an attempt to train students *both* in the disciplines of the modern academy *and* in methods of pragmatic and scriptural inquiry for repairing academic practices if necessary. Even in times of peace cultivating pragmatic methods is important, if only to keep alive their memory for future occasions of crisis. But SIP students also tend to be animated by a sense that our present moment is one in which deep repairs are urgently needed in modern Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities.

3. Hearth to Hearth

For Ochs the fruit of wisdom must ultimately be *peace,* the deep correspondence of the habits of individuals and their communities with the broader

social and natural world. Years of experience practicing SR persuaded Ochs that shared scriptural study is "the behavior around which we could build a best practice of inter-Abrahamic peace."[83] In the past decade, Ochs has been involved in a number of experimental enterprises aimed at bringing the logic of Scriptural Reasoning to bear more directly on the problem of global interreligious violence.

In doing so, Ochs generalized his concept of scripture into that of a *hearth,* that which is for some tradition its deepest source of holiness. Like fire, the holy is ambivalent: like a flame burning in the hearth it may bring warmth and life, but like an inferno it may also burn and kill. *Hearth to Hearth* refers to modes of interreligious engagement that engage with the holy as a potential source of peace, rather than bracketing it out of fear of its potential for violence. Ochs partnered with the U.S. State Department during the Obama administration to train diplomats to engage with religious ideas and practices as potential sources of solutions to religious violence. He and other members of the Scriptural Reasoning community founded an organization called the Global Covenant of Religions that brings together religious leaders, scholars, and civic organizations who seek to reduce religious violence by drawing on resources within religious traditions themselves. His recently founded Global Initiative on Religion, Politics, and Conflict at the University of Virginia cultivates interdisciplinary research into the causes of and potential solutions to religious violence.[84]

As part of this University of Virginia initiative, under his leadership a team of scholars has begun to develop empirical methods for predicting occurrences of religious violence that can guide the interventions of peacemakers. Religious violence is the kind of "wicked" problem whose uniqueness and complexity make it ill-suited for ordinary methods of analysis.[85] In collaboration with scholars of religion and data scientists, Ochs' team has begun developing methods for predicting religious violence by analyzing changes in a community's linguistic practices. Many scholars have attempted to develop *semantic* tools for predicting religious violence by drawing inferences from the meanings of words. In a method like sentiment analysis, for example, researchers might assign positive or negative values to key words (such as "love" or "kill") and predict the behavior of a group by the frequency with which these words appear.

However, Ochs' team argues that when dealing with wicked problems like religious violence, a *pragmatic* method of analysis that attends to the

83. Ochs, "Possibilities and Limits," 494.

84. "UVA Research Initiative."

85. On wicked problems, see Rittel and Webber, "Dilemmas," 155–69.

various ways words are used is more predictive. In their method of Value Predicate Analysis, researchers identify words that express the predicates of value judgments, such as "love" or "hate." They then count the number of distinct ways core value terms are used within a given community. Rather than asking about the positive or negative *content* of the term, this method determines its *semantic range*, the number of distinct meanings a community assigns to a given value term. The semantic range can then be used to determine the *linguistic flexibility* of a community. Groups for which key value terms tend to have a low semantic range (only one or two meanings) display significant inflexibility. Groups for which key value terms have between three and six meanings display moderate linguistic flexibility. Groups for which key terms have seven or more display extreme linguistic flexibility, where interpretive freedom passes into license and anarchy.

Ochs' team has found that this performative analysis of linguistic flexibility is more predictive of a group's behavior than ordinary semantic analyses.

> Linguistic response to other groups is a measure of how a group's language use adjusts to a group's proximity to other groups of various kinds. Moderate linguistic flexibility corresponds to a group's moderate openness to intergroup communication, within the limits of what is deemed necessary to preserving group identity and purpose.[86]

By contrast, excessive linguistic flexibility or inflexibility signal different kinds of threats to communal life. Excessive flexibility signals the "anarchy of individual choice," auguring societal breakdown. Excessive inflexibility signals resistance to engagement with other groups or forms of engagement that are dangerous or predatory. These kinds of communities are especially prone to violence. Ochs' work suggests that communities with moderate flexibility are especially fruitful partners for peacebuilding efforts. This result holds irrespective of the meaning or valence of their value terms. All other things being equal, a group that frequently uses a "positive" word like "love," but does so in only one way, is more prone to violence than one that frequently uses a "negative" word like "hate" in four or five different ways. When a community's language becomes less flexible—if the number of distinct meanings of value predicates is reduced to one or two—this is a sign that religious violence has become more likely.

It is fitting that our exposition of Ochs' thought culminates here, in his efforts to enact the irenic logic of pragmatism by working for peace and justice. Ours is a historical moment marked by both misological skepticism

86. Ochs et al., "Value Predicate Analysis," 101 (italics original).

and a troubling increase in religious and other forms of violence. Within his lifetime, Ochs' pragmatic vision of rationality as wisdom that brings peace has perhaps never been more needful than it is today.

IV. Essays in This Volume

> καὶ ἐδικαιώθη ἡ σοφία ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν τέκνων αὐτῆς.
>
> Wisdom is justified by all her children. (Luke 7:35)

The essays included in this Festschrift are another display of the fruits borne by his thinking, in its capacity to generate thought in his colleagues and students. Most of these authors have been shaped not only by Ochs' writings but by friendship with Ochs himself and by participation in the communities of study and practice that he has spent his life cultivating.

The essays in part one, Logic and Philosophy, pay tribute to Ochs as a teacher of philosophy whose careful accounts of how people think speak directly to the communal needs of Jews and Christians. This section begins with Robert Gibbs' meditation on Ochs' work as a performance of the Mishnaic teaching, "make yourself a teacher, buy yourself a companion. Judge every person in the side of merit" (Pirkei Avot 1.5). Gibbs' reflection illuminates the particular lines of communal relation that emerge from Ochs' account of the sociality of judgment, lines that connect students to teachers, teachers to companions, and companions to moral guides. Each is needed to exercise the perpetual connection between learning and doing, study and practice, knowledge and virtue. Gibbs' essay is a fitting introduction to the whole volume because it identifies a common thread linking each of the essays that follows: the shared appreciation for Ochs as a companion and fellow laborer in the work of practical judgment and, above all, as a teacher who helps them "address [their] most compelling and difficult questions."

In his essay, "The Neglected Argument Against Nominalism," Nicholas Adams explains how his encounter with Ochs' reparative understanding of inquiry dramatically altered his participation in the Christian theological tradition. He learned from Ochs that thinking is at once inquiry, investigation, repair, and discovery. Unlike the razor sharp dismissal and dichotomization of claims characteristic of modern conceptions of "critique," Ochs' scriptural pragmatism taught Adams to identify and wisely discern the difference between claims that speak to urgent communal problems and those that do not. So understood, the work of critique feeds traditions of thought instead of polarizing them.

Like Nicholas Adams, Daniel Weiss also honors Ochs' pragmatic logic. In his essay, "Nonviolence without Conceptualism," Weiss examines how Ochs' work on John Howard Yoder shows that nonviolent conceptual content may nevertheless be *logically* violent. By investigating the relationship between rabbinic texts and an ethics of nonviolence, Weiss appeals to Ochs' pragmatism to caution against a crude and ultimately polemical conceptualism that itself does violence to the reflective possibilities implicit in the practical reason displayed in rabbinic texts.

In his essay, "Ochs, Wisdom, and the Logic of Vagueness," Mark Randall James uses Ochs' logic of vagueness to rebut the charge that Ochs' theological "post-liberalism" collapses into relativism. James shows that vagueness is a mode of indeterminacy whose full meaning depends on the outcome of inquiry, rather than the arbitrary application of communal conventions. Ochs' appreciation for a "logic of vagueness" enables us to understand how, for post-liberal theologians, communal religious claims can be accountable to the world.

Ochs' logic of vagueness not only short-circuits commonly held accusations of post-liberal relativism, however. As Jim Fodor explains in his essay, "Phronesis, Friendship, and SR," it also promotes a conception of inquiry as an exercise in the development of Aristotelian *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and friendship. If, as Fodor maintains, friendship is an outcome of practicing Scriptural Reasoning, it is one that emerges from the logic of vagueness, which requires scriptural reasoners to identify the communal contexts and needs of real persons to generate the judgments that promote their existential, material, and ethical well-being.

The essays in part one demonstrate how Ochs' scriptural pragmatism gives new life to age-old wisdom traditions that challenge modernity's abstract and narrow construal of the relationship between logic and communal ways of living. Doing so not only alters modern conceptions of inquiry, however. It also reconceptualizes the academy, the site within which inquiry transpires. As described above, Ochs has concretized a number of these connections in the development of the Scripture, Interpretation, and Practice program at the University of Virginia. In part two of the volume, Academy and Method, contributors honor the transformative effects of Ochs' reparative reasoning on the theory and practice of the modern Western academy.

Ochs' deep concern with repairing the divide between inquiry and common-sense problem-solving has resonated with many readers. In his essay, "Peter Ochs and the Purpose of Philosophy," Jacob Goodson illuminates the impact of Cartesianism on Ochs' description of the role of the philosopher in the academy. In particular, Goodson focuses on Ochs' writings from 1991–2001 which applaud the Cartesian concern to repair

problems in one's received tradition, but also call for a recognition of the context-specific nature of the problems in need of repair and the value of an appeal to the logic and wisdom of scripture as a resource that enables the philosopher to appreciate the limits of her diagnostic and reparative efforts. In Goodson's estimation, Ochs' account not only provides a model for the role of the philosopher as scholar but informs Goodson's own understanding of the role of the philosopher as teacher as well.

If, however, Ochs' work reforms teaching and learning practices in the university classroom, it does so in large measure as a consequence of its intervention into academic methods of inquiry. In their contributions, Emily Filler, Rumee Ahmed, Basit Koshul, Laurie Zoloth, and Rachel Muers attest to the wide-range of scholarly areas affected by Ochs' reflections on academic method. In her essay, "Pragmatic Historiography," Emily Filler reflects upon Ochs' "pragmatic historiography," which recognizes the role that nonstrictly empirical factors play in the development of a thought-system. Contemporary Jewish philosophy in particular has much to gain from pragmatic historiography, as Filler demonstrates by applying it to scholarly accounts of Martin Buber's reading and translation of 1 Sam 15.

Similarly, Rumee Ahmed's essay, "Scriptural Reasoning and Islamic Studies," discusses reparative reasoning's value for resolving the Insider/Outsider debate within Islamic studies. Ahmed also discusses how Ochs' attention to the context specificity of rules of reasoning has enriched his own scholarly efforts to examine genealogical developments in Islamic law.

In his piece, "Scripturally Inspired, Philosophically Sound: From the Personal to the Academic," Basit Koshul describes Ochs' role in the dramatic shift in his understanding of the work of Max Weber, typically considered the father of secularism. Even more important for Koshul is how in his person and in his teaching, Ochs helped Koshul overcome the binary between academic inquiry and faithful religious practice.

In her essay, "Reading Your Neighbor's Scripture: Peter Ochs and the Creation of Religious Community," Laurie Zoloth honors Ochs' reconceptualization and reconfiguration of the academy as a public space of neighborly conduct, embodied in the practice of Scriptural Reasoning. Scriptural Reasoning, she maintains, instills an ethics of exchange, existential concern, and peacemaking that alters the complacent sense of privilege and privacy often present across academic disciplines and institutions. For Zoloth, Scriptural Reasoning reminds us of the higher social purpose and responsibility scholars have to the public sphere we all inhabit.

Lastly, Rachel Muer's piece, "What Is the Real Problem?" highlights her appreciation for Ochs' reparative reasoning as a guide to a "therapeutic" approach to inquiry. Not only, in her estimation, does Ochs' work allow

scholars and teachers to acknowledge points of individual and communal anxiety as justifiable origins for academic reflection and adjudication. It also instills in them a sense of moral responsibility and accountability to respond to these points of suffering as they manifest themselves in processes of knowledge production and acquisition.

Chief among the disciplines most affected by Ochs' work is contemporary theology. In part three, Theology, we include essays that detail the consequences of Ochs' pragmatism for contemporary theological work. The first three essays in this section celebrate Ochs' importance for Jewish theology. In his essay, "Theosemiosis and the Void: Kabbalistic Infinity through a Peircian Lens," Eliot Wolfson identifies similarities between the Kabbalistic account of the emanation of the universe from an original infinite nothing and Peirce's theosemiotic conception of the universe's emergence from pure possibility. The playful and prayerful practice of Musement that, for Peirce, awakens a living belief in God's reality, echoes, for Wolfson, the joyful eroticism with which the kabbalist speaks of the overflow of divine being.

Along similar lines, Steven Kepnes' piece, "Naming God," illustrates the connection between Ochs' semiotics and a negative Jewish theology. For Kepnes, appreciation for God's name as what Ochs calls a "genuine symbol" captures both the "unsayability" of God's nature and the ongoing hermeneutical conversations about God that this name inspires.

In his contribution, "Supersessionism, Zionism and Reparative Theology," Shaul Magid earmarks the positive consequences of Ochs' theological pragmatics for Jewish political theology. Magid argues that Ochs' pragmatism inspires a detailed and situational examination of the practical outcomes of particular forms of Zionist political theology that introduces a much-needed rational standard for evaluating long disputed ideological positions.

In their essays, Mike Higton, Tom Greggs, and Susannah Ticciati pay tribute to the value of Ochs' thought for their own work in Christian theology. In an essay entitled, "Lindbeck, Doctrine, and Reading," Mike Higton discusses the conceptual resemblance between George Lindbeck's postliberalism and Ochs' scriptural pragmatism. Ochs' interpretation of Lindbeck helps clarify Lindbeck's account of reading within and without the Christian tradition.

Tom Greggs' essay, "Never a Liberal to Be 'Post' It: (Re-)learning to Be a Better Evangelical with Peter Ochs," performs an encounter between Ochs' Scriptural Reasoning and the Reformation's doctrine of *sola scriptura*. Interpreted through the lens of his appreciation for Ochs' theological humility, Greggs concludes that *sola scriptura* is not an authorization for the individual to interpret God's Word alone, but rather an ecclesial doctrine that signals

the ultimate strangeness of the Word of God and invites individuals to practice communal forms of scriptural reasoning.

Finally, Susannah Ticciati's essay, "Who Is Israel: Ochs, Barth and Romans 9–11" explores the value of Ochs' logic of vagueness for assessing Karl Barth's *Israellehre*. Ticciati explains that Ochs' work shows how Israel forgetfulness is first and foremost a scriptural forgetfulness, which can be remedied through a renewed Christian commitment to engaging with the Hebrew Scriptures. This central Ochsian insight challenges Karl Barth's over-determined account of Israel. Instead, Ticciati calls Christians to recognize the diversity and provisionality of accounts of what it means to identify with the biblical community of Israel.

We cannot imagine a more fitting conclusion to our volume than the tributes to friendship in the essays by Stanley Hauerwas and David Ford. Hauerwas' meditation on theology as humor aptly titled "How to Be Theologically Funny" celebrates the many years of laughter he has shared with Peter. As anyone who has had the privilege of befriending Peter knows, humor is a *lingua franca* that he most joyously uses to communicate across religious, cultural, economic, and ideological differences. If, as Hauerwas insists, theology is and even should be funny, this is because, as Ochs has long realized, knowing God is a fundamentally human task. The slippage between God's perfection and human error is funny, if and when the God before whom we slip is a loving God whose greatest effects appear in our efforts to be holy as he is holy—despite the comedy of errors that inevitably ensues.

In his essay, "Mutual Intensities; Abductive Attraction; God: Thinking with Peter Ochs," David Ford offers an elegant tribute to his nearly three decades of friendship with Peter and their shared connection to the late Daniel Hardy, David Ford's father-in-law and Peter's dear friend. Here Ford recounts the vibrant colored threads of these relationships and their emergence in Scriptural Reasoning, through times of prayer and in the ongoing labor and mystery of the theological imagination.

In our deepest gratitude for what he has taught us, for being our companion and aiding us in cultivating wise judgment, we offer these essays in honor of Peter Ochs and with the laughter and joy we hope to share with him for many years to come.

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