

An Introduction to Scriptural Reasoning through Philosophy: Habermas, Levinas, Peirce

*A Set of Lectures
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Lectures

- 1) What Is Scriptural Reasoning?
- 2) Triadic Reasoning: Charles Sanders Peirce's Pragmatism
- 3) The Face of the (Religious) Other: Emmanuel Levinas's Ethics
- 4) Why Make Deep Reasonings Explicit? Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Rationality
- 5) Conclusion: Scriptural Reasoning, the Socratic Method, and the Theory of Communicative Rationality

Argument

The practice of Scriptural Reasoning (SR) came out of a course at Drew University called "Plato and the Prophets," but Plato's philosophy has never aided scriptural reasoners in articulating the nature and purpose of SR. Does this mean that SR is an ant-philosophical practice? Not at all! It means, rather, that scriptural reasoners have found that late 19th century and 20th century philosophy provides the best sources for reflecting on the practice of SR. Although SR oftentimes looks like the ancient Jewish practice of *chevruta*, I believe that the practice of SR results from particular insights found and moves made within modern philosophy.

The three most prominent philosophers for explanations concerning the practice of SR come from three different countries: the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, and the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. The founder of the practice of SR, Peter Ochs (University of Virginia), has spent his career exploring multiple ways in which Peirce's philosophy aids religious studies and theological reasoning; in Ochs's work, Peirce's pragmatism and semiotics serve as the best philosophical foundation for the practice of SR. The Jewish philosopher Robert Gibbs (University of Toronto) argues that Emmanuel Levinas's ethical theory—known, most precisely, as emphasizing the "Face-of-the-Other"—provides the best philosophical foundation for how persons engage with one another in and through the practice of SR. The Scottish philosophical theologian Nicholas Adams (Birmingham University) makes a strong case for Jürgen Habermas's theory of communication as the best philosophical interlocutor for understanding how argumentation, conversation, and debate work within the practice of SR. In particular, Adams claims that the practice of SR can be described as the process of "making deep reasonings public." While this phrase does not come from Habermas's writings, Adams rightly thinks that it reflects the role of religious reasoning within Habermas's theory of communicative action.

The lecture series explains how each philosopher—Peirce, Levinas, Habermas—aid us in understanding the practice of Scriptural Reasoning. I conclude with a defense of Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality as the best-suited philosophical theory for understanding SR. Perhaps ironically, Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality returns us to Ancient Philosophy: SR as a kind of Socratic method.