PHILOSOPHIC WARRANTS FOR SCRIPTURAL REASONING

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Introduction

Scriptural Reasoning (SR) is a practice of philosophic theology that is offered as a rationally warranted albeit fallible response to the inadequacies of modern liberal *and* anti-liberal theologies whether they are adopted as academic projects or as dimensions of lived religious practice. In terms of everyday religious practice in the West today, SR may be characterized as an effort, at once, to help protect Abrahamic folk traditions (that is, of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) from the cultural and theological effects of residual western colonialism *and* to help protect religiously pluralist societies in the West from reactionary, anti-modern movements within these traditions. In the terms of recent academic discourse in theology, SR may be characterized as *pragmatic*, *postliberal*, *scriptural*, and *inter-Abrahamic*.

SR may be labeled "*pragmatic*," because it employs philosophic reasoning only to identify problems in its practitioners' communities of everyday practice and in the institutions that are expected to repair them. SR may be labeled "*postliberal*," because it emerges as a response to problems in the projects of modern, liberal theology, in particular this theology's inadequate attention to problems in everyday practice. At the same time, SR is equally critical of anti-liberal theologies, or those that, rejecting the autonomy of human reason, argue for the opposite: grounding all projects of reasoning on a practice of "Christian reasoning" per se (or, comparably, of other confession-grounded reasonings).

SR enlists many "postmodern" strategies in its critique of the modern complex of liberal-or-anti-liberal argumentation, but it argues that standard postmodern criticisms do not apply to the SR practice of scriptural theology.[1] Briefly stated for want of space, we may say that the force of most

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postmodern criticisms is captured in the critique of "foundationalism": or the effort to locate some truth claim(s), independent of inherited traditions of practice, on the basis of which to construct reliable systems of belief and practice. Most efforts of this kind come in the form of "intuitionism": or the belief that such truth claims may come in the form of discrete, self-legitimating cognitions.[2] SR tends to be distinctive among other postmodern and postliberal projects in its commitment to *reading scripture* as its formational discipline. It is unique, moreover, in its including *Christians, Muslims, and Jews* in this discipline while also honoring postliberal claims about the text-and-tradition specificity of any practice of knowing and acting in the world. How SR can achieve all these ends is the subject of this issue. Within that subject, the purpose of this essay is to illustrate a logical strategy for warranting and testing the work of SR. Beyond the limits of SR, this model is also offered as a more economical and less language-specific criterion for warranting and testing all postmodern criticisms of the failings of modernist projects or their equivalents.

A Logical Strategy for Postmodernism/Postliberalism

The logical strategy is, briefly put, to distinguish between the binary logics that help us recognize marks of both suffering and oppression and the triadic logics that help us recognize and recommend acts of repair and redemption. Lacking this distinction would render postmodern and postliberal projects more liable to replaying some of the errors they criticize in modernist philosophies or liberal theologies. It would tend, for example, to encourage postmodern critics to adopt the binary logic of suffering as if it were also a logic of repair. Once adopted as a basis for action, however, this binary logic would be indistinguishable from the logic of oppression, and postmodern efforts at repair would prove to be as oppressive as they were reparative. Among postliberals, the errant tendency would, most likely, be to assimilate the marks of suffering and of oppression: assuming, on the one hand, that the binary logics of modernity are marks only of oppression rather than also of suffering while, on the other hand, making assertions on behalf of Christian care for the oppressed through binary logics that also serve their oppressors.

The Logic of Suffering and the Logic of Oppression

One set of guidelines for summarizing all the postmodern criticisms of modernity is this:

(a) To note that every object of opprobrium (*totalité*, colonial oppression, substantialism, and so on) belongs to a mode of argumentation or belief or practice that can be adequately described in the terms of modern

propositional logic or, in other words, in terms brought to a *reductio ad absurdum* in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.

(b) To note that, with the exception of extreme forms of postmodernism, the critique is aimed not at the logic itself but only at its misapplication, which is most often a matter of quantification or modality. In the first instance, modernists are said to err by misapplying universal quantifiers to finite domains of reference. In the second instance, they err by mis-categorizing actual or possible claims as necessary or impossible.[3] In Descartes' terms, each error may be ascribed to an act of asserting the will beyond the limits of warranted observation/cognition.

(c) To recognize that the grounds for this critique are often but not always apparent in the rhetoric of modernist argumentation. As a result, postmodern and postliberal criticisms often give rise to counter arguments that *accept* the standard of criticism but challenge the evidence for applying it to a given case. As if to say: "yes totalizing is bad, but I do not do it." Our logical contribution has the advantage of providing formal criteria that make it more difficult to defend against postmodern criticisms, since not only the defendant but also the postmodern plaintiff will, more often than not, appear guilty according to these criteria.

(d) To adopt, therefore, the following stages of criticism[4]: (1) any claims are suspect if they bear the quantifier "universal" or the modal character "necessary" or "impossible"; (2) all such claims remain suspect if they may be restated as a series of discrete propositions, each one of which can be readily inferred from another and each one of which obeys the principles of excluded middle and non-contradiction; (3) claims that remain suspect after step #2 are removed from suspicion *only* if they can be shown to be tautological (analytic in Kant's terms) in either of two senses: with respect to common sense conventions (dictionary definitions and matters of speech or of the media of argument); or with respect to any given system of beliefs or explanations. In the latter case, the claim may be restated as "universal (or necessary/impossible) for all adherents to the given system," but *as of indeterminate quantification and modality for all others*.[5]; (4) claims that remain suspect after step #3 may be adequately redescribed as *binary claims*, or claims that assert that "only X or Y are true claims about the world," that "Y is the contradictory of X (Y = −X)," and that, therefore "only X is true.[6]"

(e) To treat all binary claims as suspect.

What do we do with such binary claims? The next step in this logical guideline is to resist the temptation to identify "suspect" claims simply with "errant" claims. This identification is the source of many errors in

postmodern and postliberal criticism, because it tempts the critic to make a binary assertion about a binary claim: that if the suspect assertion was "X", then that is prima facie reason for considering "-X" as at least a reasonable hypothesis.[7] The next step is, instead, genealogical: to label each binary claim a confused symptom of some as yet unarticulated problematic situation. This is a Deweyan move comparable to Foucault and also John Milbank's genealogical moves. There is error in the claim, but the error belongs only to the claimant or the school of inadequate reasoning that he or she serves. As every hermeneut of suspicion has suggested—from Nietzsche to Derrida—whatever is an error in the realm of formal cognition becomes a performance of (unintentional) concealment in the realm of history and social/religious life. A binary claim is prima facie a non-claim. But the fact that we are interested in it generally accompanies our own sense that the claimant is a worthy antagonist of some sort, whose claims represent a significant event in the idea life of our society or faith tradition. This means that the binary claim also has the pragmatic force of a mark of societal disruption: something is amiss. At the same time, our critique of this claim, up to step #4 above, is itself attached to a binary claim: "X is true or is not true." The fact of *this* binary should alert us to the pragmatic force of *our own interest in this* "*error*": that something is amiss with us too. At the very least, our peace is amiss, since we now recognize something is wrong with our neighbor (this modernist). More likely, we also recognize something of our selves, let alone of our societal context, in our neighbor's error, so we realize that his/her error is something that implicates us as well. Our next move is as much for self-love as neighbor love: to look for ways to heal the condition that gave rise to the binary reasoning.[8]

With limited space, I suggest we look, for now, only at two reasonable hypotheses about what is amiss: suffering and oppression. Calling these "hypotheses" is a critical step in SR's approach to truth, displaying SR's refusal to replace modernist intuitionism with what would be an oxymoronic "post-postmodern" intuitionism. For SR, every discrete cognition by individual humans bears the public force of a probable claim or hypothesis. Following Charles Peirce, we may label the conscious or unconscious processes that lead to such cognitions "abduction", and we may note that abductions are warranted, ultimately, only by the long run of history.[9] In the short run, we have the limited warrants only of the community that shares our reasons for offering such abductions, and these reasons constitute the "presuppositions" that mark the particularity and finitude of our hypotheses. *To argue in this humble way is not to forestall faith or confident action in the world. It is, to the contrary, a sign of faith, for it means that we are unafraid to act and let God and the events of history judge and correct us. According to SR, theologians who seek "universal warrants" for beliefs and action prior to action display the same kind of anxiety or lack of faith that marks the Cartesian project.*

In this case, our hypotheses about suffering and oppression draw on two presuppositions. *The first is that our several scriptural traditions converge on this single command: we are to care for those who suffer. The second presupposition is that the logic of caring differs from the logic of suffering and of oppression. The first presupposition, which I will turn to now, displays the scriptural ground of pragmatism's critique of modernism. The second presupposition will enable us, in this essay's concluding section, to distinguish between SR's alternative to modernism and the alternatives offered by other postmodern and postliberal projects.*

We are to Care for Those Who Suffer
Prototypically characterized as "the poor, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the other, the naked, the hungry, those who sit in the dust", these are all recognized as those who cry out in pain or those whose cries we should hear even if they are unable to cry out loud. We cannot and need not try to define what "suffering" means, beyond identifying it with "the reason for someone's crying out" and "the reason for me to see that something is amiss". For our scriptural traditions, our capacities both to suffer and to recognize suffering in others belong to who we are as creatures of the God who created heaven and earth. SR draws its critical practice, in part, from the tradition of philosophic pragmatism, because this pragmatism drew its rule of repair from out of the same scriptural sources. In Charles Peirce's words, "pragmatism is but a logical corollary of Jesus' words 'That ye may know them by their fruit.' "[10] From the command to care for those who suffer comes the pragmatic maxim for academics: that you may wield the sword of theoretical reasoning only for the sake of repairing institutions that fail in their work of helping repair suffering by repairing broken practices of everyday life.[11] Were it not for our prior commitment to the commands of scripture, we would have no irresistible warrant for choosing "care for those who suffer" as one of the indubitable purposes of our academic work as well as our interpersonal engagements.[12] Nor would we have sufficient warrant for adopting pragmatism as a primary resource for our critique of the modern academy.

Peirce's studies in phenomenology—or what he considered abductive speculations about the elemental categories of our experience of the world—help us link his pragmatism further to scripture's account of creation, suffering, and redemption.

Firstness and Creation. Peirce labeled the first of his three phenomenological categories "Firstness", corresponding to what he considered the irreducible element of spontaneity, originality, and freedom in every thing we experience in the world—and, *therefore*, in every conceivable dimension of the world itself. We say "therefore" because Peirce argued, against Kant, that the notion of "unknowable dimensions of the world", or *noumena*, was senseless, since we cannot have evidence concerning what we cannot know. He concluded that there was therefore no prima facie reason for our

imagining that the elements of our experience are not also elements of the world per se. Both this conclusion and the notion of Firstness reflect Peirce's understanding of the phenomenological force of the Biblical doctrine of creation. "All reality," writes Peirce, "is due to the creative power of God. . . . In general, God is perpetually creating us."[13] In Peirce's reading, to be created is to be known by God and knowable by his creatures. Anything like "noumenal" reality could be attributed, if at all, only to God, but not to any aspect of the creation. God's activity of creating, furthermore, must be characterized by Firstness since this creativity is the prototype of freedom and spontaneity. As created, being is therefore, everywhere, touched by Firstness. If this is so, then modernity's mechanistic view of the universe is false, along with anything like Laplace's determinism.

To date, the evidence of natural science corroborates this feature of creationism. For example, quantum physicists have, now for a century, attributed chance behavior to sub-atomic particles. By-passing the limits of Newtonian mechanics, they have nonetheless successfully applied non-standard logics, probability theory and such mathematical innovations as matrix theory to recover strategies for rational behavior in a world of what we call irreducible Firstness.[14] These strategies open new areas of convergence or at least parallelism between the procedures of science and of scriptural interpretation in the Abrahamic traditions. One primary example is the place of irreducible vagueness or indeterminacy in both realms of inquiry. Early quantum theorists (Heisenberg and Bohr, or what is called the "Copenhagen" school of particle physics) argued that one could not simultaneously identify both the space-time coordinates (or the "particle-like" character) and the relative velocity (or the "wave-like" character) of subatomic particles. The physicist achieves precision with respect to one character only at the expense of precision with respect to the other. This phenomenon is related to another: the unavoidable influence that the observer—or the instruments of measurement—has on what is observed. This influence may at times be negligible in measurements of macroscopic phenomena, but it is always a factor in sub-atomic measurements. This is because the instrument of measurement is the very interference of another sub-atomic particle (such as photon or electron) with the particle to be measured. A resultant, third feature of measurement is what, after Peirce, we may label its "*abductive*" character: the fact that the product of measurement is meaningful for us only in relation to the specific conditions of measurement. For our present purposes, three of these conditions are of particular interest: *the material and formal conditions of measurement* (laboratory procedures or rules; and the physical make-up of equipment used); *ontology or mathematical-system* (in terms of what picture of the world the laboratory was set-up: typically some mathematical account of the sub-atomic environment to be observed); and *the specific questions asked or test performed*.

Now, consider the parallel phenomena in classical scriptural hermeneutics. I will refer to rabbinic scriptural interpretation as an example. The rabbinic sages regard the words of scripture (Tanakh, or what some call the "Hebrew Bible") as utterly authoritative but meaningful only by way of the act of reading. The latter condition may sound self-evident, but only to the ears of "intuitionists", to re-invoke the terms we used earlier for modern foundationalists who believe that they have direct or self-legitimating cognitions of the outer or inner worlds. For the rabbinic sages, reading is an *abductive activity*, which means that they read words of scripture the way quantum physicists measure sub-atomic particles. A reading of scripture is therefore meaningful only with respect to the specific conditions of reading. What we called *the material and formal conditions of measurement* parallel what the rabbinic sages considered *the many levels of study* requisite to scriptural reading. There are, for example, the capacity to use language in general; the capacity to read Hebrew in particular (Scripture may also be read in translation, but such reading remains derivative); years of learning how to read the Bible's grammars, syntax, semantics and also pragmatics (that is, its various patterns of context-specific meaning or force); then there is the depth of experience in life itself (since Scripture displays its meaning with respect to everyday life in this world as well as to features of life in the world to come: all of which entails multiple levels of biological, personal, social, political, and spiritual life, and so on). In the words of *Shammai* in Mishnah *Pirke Avot* ("Ethics of the Fathers" 1:15): "Make the study of Torah your primary occupation; Say little do much; Greet every person with a cheerful face."

For the rabbis, what we called the physicist's *ontology or mathematical-system* parallels the reader's elemental modes of relationship to God, to Torah, and to Israel.[15] Finally, *the questions asked or the tests performed by the physicist* parallel the immediate, real-life questions that the rabbinic reader must ask of Scripture in order for Scripture to disclose its meaning and force for this time of reading. Michael Fishbane refers to this feature of rabbinic reading the "exegetical construction of reality and the transformation of the culture into the images produced by that exegesis. . . . The world of the text serves as the basis for the textualization of the world—and its meaning."[16]

In sum, *rabbinic reading is abductive*, which means that each reading of Scripture as Scripture displays an element of Firstness or chance, newness, and spontaneity. A modernist critic might conclude that rabbinic scriptural reading is therefore "relativistic" or "purely subjective". A postmodern critic might conclude either that the rabbis were radical postmodernists *or* that they contradicted themselves when they asserted that Scripture is, nonetheless, authoritative in the way that it commands behavior. Postliberals who consider themselves "post-postmodern" might voice aspects of both these modern and postmodern criticisms: concluding that the rabbis

were right to receive the divine word as ever-new but wrong to associate this newness with the particularizing conditions of local reading. According to SR, however, such modern, postmodern, and post-postmodern criticisms would misrepresent the meaning of abductive reading. All three criticisms reduce abduction to the either-or terms of a binary logic. Both modernist and postmodern criticisms would err in identifying non-determinism with subjectivism or relativism (one approving the result, one disapproving). A post-postmodern criticism would appear, in contradictory fashion, to assert features of both modernism and anti-modernism. In Cartesian fashion, it would appear to identify certainty or authoritative knowledge with the character of a discrete intuition and then to identify the rabbis' non-intuitionism with some variety of relativism. At the same time, the criticism would also appear, in anti-Cartesian fashion, to identify authoritative knowledge with participation in some life that cannot be identified through any series of discrete propositions. Rabbinic reading is also reading from out of a life rather than some set of propositions. But a post-postmodern critic would appear not to identify "life" with as this-worldly an activity as the rabbis have in mind. For this reason, the critic would appear to have in mind a life that is, somehow, also entered by way of intuitions—a notion that appears contradictory by SR standards.[17]

For SR, reading Scripture is abductive because all knowledge in this created world is abductive, and that includes our knowledge of God. As the rabbinic sages say, "God is known only in His actions": "R. Abba b. Mammel said: God said to Moses, 'You want to know My name? Well, I am called according to My work.' "[18] And this includes His on-going activities of creating worlds and speaking Scripture: "For in Your goodness, day after day, You renew the order of creation."[19] To know God through His actions is to know Him directly since He is in His actions. Peirce also recognizes this in his claim that "Thirdness [which is our knowledge of God in the world] pours in on us directly."[20] But to speak of knowing God only "through His actions" is the rabbis'—and the pragmatist's—way of saying that we know God abductively: knowing *that* He is there as certainly as we know anything, but knowing *of* Him only in relation to how and where we know and always subject to further refinement and correction. This means that our knowledge is "entangled": it doesn't come as bits of information there for anyone anytime to value but as parts of some greater whole, of which at any time we see and understand only some features with instructions about where and how to turn to see and understand more. Our knowing is a relationship, only partly cognitive, that leads us into further and further circles of relationship if we seek to pursue knowledge further. But to know something or someone in its Firstness is not yet to have been moved to seek knowledge or enter into relationship.

Secondness, Facticity, and Suffering. Firstness is only part of the story of creation. There is also the Biblical account of Adam and Eve and, with it, an

account of error, sin, and suffering in the world. The narrative's move from "and it was good" to "and they were thrust out of the Garden" corresponds to the move, within Peirce's phenomenology, from the category of Firstness to that of Secondness: the irreducible element of pain, struggle, resistance, volition, and shock in the world. Once again, what Peirce sees in human experience he also attributes, per hypothesis, to the world, so that, just as Adam and Eve leave the Garden, so too may all created beings find themselves cast into a realm of struggle and loss as well as gift. But they cause pain and loss as much as they suffer it. For Peirce, the binary character of Secondness is not directional: to push the world or be pushed by it, either way we are dealing with an event of two-ness. Secondness is the category of fact, not value; there is no possibility in it, no quality of anything, since qualia are Firsts, and a Second is not a First plus One, but the negation of a First, its contrary. It just is, or they are—this non-relational pairing of two. For this reason, Peirce suggests that philosophers like Kant err when they label pain the quality of a feeling, like pleasure. For Peirce, pleasure is a feeling, but pain is something else: a mark of separation or change, a reason to flee something or a mark of having fled, associated in human physiology with many feelings, but not itself a feeling.[21]

To refer to Secondness is thus to introduce movement into a phenomenology, since Secondness marks *force* rather than quality: the realm of effects, not ideas. Cognition of a Second, such as Pain, is not the cognition of any quality but, rather, the registration of some *event*: *that* there has been some interruption, the shock of some No!—so that now something is different. This registration of difference is what we mean by an awareness of movement: something we characterized as "here" or "this" may now also be characterized as "not here" or "not this". Since there is no direction predicated of this difference, however, we can refer to the movement only formally—*that* it is the case, but without any further characterization. As we will explain in the next section, Peirce introduced the term *indexicality* to name this kind of bare, demonstrative reference, and he characterized each reference to a second as an index, or deictic sign. A cry, we will say, is an indexical mark that there is pain there, somewhere.

Thirdness: Hearing, Saying, Relating and Repairing. To hear a cry, however, and then to move toward it is to introduce some third thing we have not yet considered: it is to *represent* the cry as a *sign*, or as something that has some meaning for us. For Peirce, this is to invoke the phenomenological category of *Thirdness:* the irreducible element of representation, relationship, mediation, and love in the world. The Biblical story does not end with Adam-Eve's exile from the Garden; it begins there, so that all the rest of the narrative is, as it were, about how to get back in or how, in other words, to repair the condition of sin and suffering that underlay the exile. The knowledge that comes by way of reading scripture is the knowledge of how to get back in.

Peirce devoted much of his formal work to proving that a Third could not be constructed out of Firsts and Seconds, or that *relationship* comes only out of other forms of relationship. One helpful product of these proofs is Peirce's logic of relatives, a way of diagramming the different classes of predicates that accompany our judgments about the Firstness, Secondness, or Thirdness of something. Thus, Peirce suggests that judgments about something in its Firstness bear only "monadic predicates", such as "—is red", or "—is awesome" (where the *blank*, —, can be filled by some subject); judgments about something in its Secondness bear only "dyadic predicates", such as "—hits—" (X hits Y) or "—dwells in—"; and judgments about something in its Thirdness bear only "triadic predicates", such as "—gives—to—" (X gives Y to Z) or "—means—to—." In these terms, to observe that someone acted some way to repair suffering would thus be to make a judgment that bears a triadic predicate, such as "—does—to repair—" (X does Y to repair Z). When we report that someone cries, it often sounds like we are making a simple judgment of quality, like "—is red"—or, in this case, "—emits the cry-sound." But reports about cries generally carry the presumption that the cry is a sign of pain or suffering uttered with the hope that someone will listen to it and respond: thus "—cries about—to—". However incompletely uttered, a cry is thus a communication or representation of pain.

Diagrammed in the terms of Peirce's logic of relatives, a cry may therefore be characterized as an *indexical sign* of pain or suffering.[22] The force of such a sign depends on the world of signs within which it is received. By revising the terms we introduced earlier for comparing physics and rabbinics, we may now characterize such "worlds of signs" as the *semiotic conditions according to which we know the world and how to act in it*. For present purposes, we may note three sets of conditions: *material and formal* (the *language* through which we know the world), *ontological* (the *practices and relationships* through which we know the world), and *interrogative* (the space-time specific questions or problems to which our activity of knowing and acting now responds).[23] According to SR, *the ontological meaning of a cry is set by Scripture's model of creation and command*: in this world created by God, a cry means, *at once*, that someone somewhere is in pain; that there is also somewhere a redeemer, or someone who can and will respond to hear and heal that pain; and that we who are in ear-shot of the cry are obligated to hear it and join in the work of healing. To worship the creator God of Israel is to retain the hope that, ultimately, each cry will be heard and the conviction that each of us is obliged to share in the hearing. According to SR, *a cry is thus defined materially and formally as at once a sign of need and an imperative to act:* a fact that carries with it not only a value but also a behavioral command. This is why the cry is received, finally, as interrogative: *the conditions of command are necessarily here-and-now*, as if to say "you who hear this cry are obliged to inquire into

and act in response to its space-time specific conditions". This is why, finally, the meaning of a cry cannot be defined once-and-for-all or atemporally or as a condition of "being in general": it is a condition of *this being*, here.

The Logic of Caring is not the Logic of Suffering and of Oppression
Sharing in a theme of David Ford's theology of wisdom, we have adopted the directive "Care for those who cry!" as a name for the maxim that guides SR's way of repairing the ills of modernism. Other essays in this collection describe and illustrate how scriptural reasoners practice this maxim. To conclude this essay, I want to recommend a logical criterion for distinguishing their practice from that of some competing projects of postmodern and postliberal criticism. The criterion is to distinguish between the dyadic logics of suffering and of oppression and the non-dyadic, or illustratively triadic, logics of caring for those who suffer and of repairing the conditions of suffering and oppression.

The two different logics are illustrated in Biblical narratives about suffering or oppression and about repair or redemption. As illustrated in the narrative of Cain of Abel, *the logic of oppressive behavior* requires only two elemental terms, so that every action or judgment made according to the logic either affirms one term or the other, and where to affirm one term means to deny the other:

> YHWH paid heed to Abel and his offering. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. YHWH said to Cain, "Why are you distressed. . . . Surely if you do right, there is uplift; But if you do not do right, Sin crouches at the door; its urge is toward you, yet you can be its master. Cain said to his brother Abel . . . (Gen. 4: 4–8)

We can map Cain's actions through a series of dyadic statements: Cain (1) gives an offering (2). God favors Abel's offering. God does not favor Cain's. Cain is angry. God says, "Do not be angry. You can control anger." Cain remains angry. Cain kills Abel. With one exception, no action toward an object is mediated by a third-something. The exception is that God offers guidance that could interrupt the two-part relation between Cain and his anger: if Cain had accepted the guidance, then we would have an action that could be mapped only through a triadic statement: God's Word (1) led Cain (2) away from his anger (3). Abel's fate can be mapped by the same logic: Abel's offering is favored. Abel is hated by Cain. Abel is killed by Cain.

This exception introduces a transitional moment between oppression and redemption. Here, the logic of attending to someone's oppression contains a moment that can be identified only through dyadic statements, but it opens as well to the possibility of three part relations:

> He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to
> Me from the ground! Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the
> ground." . . . Cain said to YHWH, "My punishment is too great to
> bear!" YHWH said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold
> vengeance shall be taken on him." And YHWH put a mark on Cain . . .
> (Gen. 4:10–15)

Reading this text leads us to re-read the first one. God's warning to Cain
appeared as if dyadic: Do this or that will follow. But the warning is more
than dyadic, since Cain lives on, bearing a mark that re-directs this
warning, outward, to any who would want to kill Cain. The warning thus
becomes a third-something: (1) a sign of (2) Cain's on-going relations, at
once, (3^1) to God and (3^2) to any other human he may meet. But, just as the
warning *to* Cain converts into a protective mark *to others*, so too do we learn
that the act of "seeing the oppressor" is coterminous with the act of
"hearing the cry of the oppressed". In each case, seeing and hearing are
two-part relations (one either sees/hears or does not), but they open out to
the possibility of three-part relations. If one oppresses Cain, then God will
act against the oppressor: the act against Cain will also be a mark of the
divine-action-that-will-come. In this way, the life of Cain introduces a
general possibility into the world: that any act of oppression/being
oppressed is a sign that God *could* respond to that act.

   Exodus 3 (or more fully Exodus 1–20) narrates God's redemptive activity
as an *actuality* rather than mere possibility. The result is a dense narrative
of indefinitely expanding circles of relationship and action, each element or
moment of which shares in the defining features of God's redemptive work
as a whole:

> An angel of YHWH appeared to [Moses] in a blazing fire out of a
> bush. . . . He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham,
> the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. . . . Now the cry of the Israelites
> has reached Me; I have seen how the Egyptians oppress them. Come,
> therefore, I will send you to Pharaoh and you shall free My people. . . .
> But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go . . . ?" And He said,
> *ehyeh imach*, "I will be with you; that shall be your sign that it was I
> who sent you." (Exodus 3:2–12)

While there is no space in this essay to unpack the riches of this passage
(and the rest of Exodus 1–20) as a narrative of redemption, we may, at least,
catalogue some of the features of redemptive work that are displayed in it.
According to SR, these are among the features we should look for in any
postliberal or postmodern effort to *repair* and not merely criticize the
failings of modernity. The most general feature I want to isolate is *the
continuity* (*or integrative character*) *of part and whole*: that is, the requirement

that every recognizable part or moment of redemption should share in the central features of redemptive activity as a whole. The following features should each illustrate this:

- *Continuity of the historical here-and-now (particular) and the eternal (infinite)*. Each moment of redemption must include the divine presence, the human presence in its space-time specific historicity, and the relationship that draws them together. In our narrative, YHVH appears in direct relation to Moses in the specific context of Israel's enslavement in ancient Egypt.
- *Continuity of past, present, and future*. While addressing the concrete details of this moment of oppression, the redemptive activity invokes and replays the prior history of God's relation with Israel, and it anticipates the near and distant future of that relation.
- *Continuity of hearing, speaking, interrogating, commanding, and acting*. Throughout the whole narrative, each of the dramatis personae—God, Moses, Israel, and/or her oppressor—are engaged in each of these activities.
- *Continuity of hermeneutical, reparative, and theophantic activities*. Each moment of redemption includes interpretive behavior (hearing words and interrogating their meaning), reparative behavior (in this case, caring for Israel), and divine-human encounters.
- *Transformation of dyadic into triadic relations, but all within the logic of triadic relations.* While, in this passage, the cry of suffering stimulates redemptive activity, the narrative as a whole suggests the triadic logic of redemption, rather than the dyadic logic of suffering. If, for example, we were to diagram the role of voices in the passages, we might refer to "(1) God speaking to (2) Moses for the sake of (3) Israel", but we would not have an instance of voices uttered outside of such a triadic relation. We do not hear the cry as mere cry, but only as what "reached Me so that I now do this". In sum, no recognizable part of the redemptive activity is dyadic.

Scriptural Reasoning as A Distinctive, Reparative Activity after Modernity

The reparative work of SR applies these features of the scriptural narrative to the practice of reading Scripture itself. For comparative purposes, the last two features are the most significant.

The continuity of hermeneutical, reparative, and theophantic activities. For SR, to encounter the divine presence is to engage in a practice of *reading* and of *interpretation*. To *read* God's disclosures means, in recognition of God's infinity and *our creatureliness*, to refrain from intuitionist claims as one would refrain from idolatry. While postmodernists tend to share in this critique of idolatry, some Christian, Muslim or Jewish postliberals may be perplexed by it. They may argue that the only alternative to modern secularism *and* postmodern relativism is a reaffirmation of truth claims under the aegis of a

given revelation and the tradition that serves it. And they may understand truth claims to take the form of what we call intuitionist claims. For SR, however, a "postliberal intuitionism" would be oxymoronic for two reasons. Limiting itself to the terms of a binary logic, it would conceive of truth claims in only binary terms: a given claim is either true or it is false; our epistemology either allows for true-or-false claims or it does not and, if not, it is relativistic; if the universalistic claims of modern secularism are false, then the universalistic claims of religion should be true. . . . But to make claims like these is to overlook a third alternative: non-foundationalist truth claims, which are truth-claims that are non-discrete, non-universal, non-necessary and non-impossible. If we think only in binary terms, then the latter may appear to be relativistic. In the terms of SR, however, these are the claims of scriptural truth. A postliberal intuitionism would be oxymoronic, secondly, because it would reduce what should be the triadic logic of redemption to the binary logic of suffering-or-oppression. The postliberal critique of modernism, for example, identifies the binary character of modernist claims as *symptoms* of the fact that somebody somewhere is suffering and, most likely, somebody is also oppressing somebody else. To express a post-liberal alternative in binary terms, however, would be to replace the marks of one kind of suffering-and-oppression with the marks of another kind. A genuine alternative to modernism should neither complain to us about some other kind of oppression, nor impose itself on us as a new kind of oppression.[24]

The transformation of dyadic into triadic relations. Perhaps the single most telling mark of SR is that its practice of repair is also a practice of reading Scripture and its practice of reading also a practice of repair. One logical rule informing this practice is that no moment of reading or of repair should warrant the construction of dyadic judgments. This does not mean that our work will be without dyads—we cannot avoid suffering them in this world—only that our obligation is to read the emergence of any dyad in our work as a mark of suffering (and, potentially, of oppression) to which we must respond, again and again if necessary, in the name of the Redeemer. Practically, all this means that, when we Jews, Muslims, and Christians (or any sub-group, intra-denominational as well) sit together to study Scripture, we acknowledge that each word and text of each Scripture participates in a potentially infinite process of semiosis. As individual or collective readers, we lack the capacity and authority to make general (and thus binary) claims to forestall that process. At the same time, from out of the here-and-now of our historical condition, we also have the capacity and authority to give witness to how we suffer, individually or collectively, in the act of reading any word or text of any Scripture. *As a dyadic mark of suffering, this witness should stimulate the reading fellowship as a whole to practice the prototypical work of SR: reparative reading that, at once, opens the text of Scripture and the life of the sufferer, one to the other, until, between them, a third something arises that we call "scriptural reasoning" per se. This reasoning is the context-specific process of*

interpretation/repair/theophany that SR practitioners consider, at once, the redemptive activity of the God whose word is Scripture and the reparative work of this particular fellowship of readers here-and-now. SR moves beyond postmodern agnosticism in its willingness to claim that, yes, we can encounter God here-and-now in the reading of Scripture. At the same time, SR protects itself from intuitionist dogmatism in its willingness to voice this claim only by way of judgments that are strictly *abductive* and that pertain only to the public fruits of any such encounter: judgments about the meanings, here-and-now, of this particular scriptural text in relation to this particular account of the social-historical moment. These judgments remain, at once, hermeneutical, reparative and theophantic: recommending ways of hearing God's word that may contribute to repairing both the textual and societal conditions of suffering that stimulated this particular project of reasoning.[25]

For SR, in short, God alone is the source of our hope that suffering and oppression can be repaired in this world, and God's Word alone is the source of our knowledge of where to turn for guidance in the pathways of repair. SR includes a family of claims about how best to turn the mind and heart to receive this guidance. Within circles of SR fellowship, I tend to warm to some such claims more than others, but I would also mistrust my own judgments and practices if they were not balanced by these others. This is because my own claims display the creatureliness of some finite *ego cogito*. SR gives hospitality to the *ego cogito*: honoring its place in God's creation and its contributions to our work of reasoning out of God's Word. But SR can neither reduce its overall work to what can be articulated within the activity of the *ego cogito* nor privilege the words of any individual thinker as true in themselves. Circles of SR fellowship generate *practices* of reading and reasoning that I believe are true to the God who is Redeemer, and I am prepared to offer philosophic and theological arguments on behalf of this truth. But, no one of these arguments can be true in itself—nor, all the more so, any one claim within those arguments. Like any reading of scripture, any claim by an individual practitioner of SR has the strength only of a strong abduction: it really points to what is really true, but only by way of the creatureliness of the one who did the pointing. To learn from the pointing—to understand and test it—is to share in the same fellowship of reading, interpretation, and discussion through which we encounter God's Word. The way we test our judgment about SR is therefore not different from the way we seek guidance from God's Word. There are no short cuts, nor should a person of faith require or ask for them.

NOTES

1   With apologies, I must, for want of space, write as if the reader shared my unstated assumptions about what these standard criticisms are and who offers them—from Dewey against the optical to Wittgenstein against foundationalism to Lyotard against master

narratives to Foucault against modernist and neo-colonialist uses of power to Derrida against presence to Levinas against *totalité*. I assume that, along with other forms of postliberalism (such as that of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck) SR shares, in part, in all these.

2   In his early, *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* papers of 1868–69, Charles Peirce identified Cartesianism with intuitionism, the assumption that there is a "cognition not determined by a previous cognition of the same object, and therefore so determined by something out of consciousness" [5.213: references are to *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, eds. Charles Harteshorne and Paul Weiss (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934/5)].

3   All forms of colonial, imperialist, and totalizing thinking extend to the "universal" claims that are appropriate to only a finite realm of evidence. Classic determinism imagined various empirical claims to be necessary or impossible, rather than probable/improbable and non-falsified.

4   The strategy here is to replace all those rhetorically dense and context-specific standards of criticism (against "foundationalism," and so on) with a nominalist-sounding suspicion of *all* general claims. This is, rather than strain to locate the crucial fault in each modernist claim, to put the onus on the claimant and say: all who dare to make general pronouncements must pass the following tests.

5   In short, this means that universals may be universal only within some finite domain of reference: such as all folks in this school, "universally"; or all claims made in this denomination. But no human can make claims, even on behalf of his/her religion, about its powers relative to some other belief or religion that has not been specifically examined. Only the Creator makes such claims, and scripture, as we will see, sets the rules for how to read them.

6   No human, in other words, is privileged to make claims about some character of all creation, so that, respecting the law of excluded middle, these claims also inform us about contradictory characters.

7   This is the "Cartesian" move: to assume that we cannot construct a model of what is true by conceiving the contradictory of what is false. Richard Bernstein does a profound job of showing how this "Cartesian" move restates feelings of over-generalized anxiety and over-generalized certainty in the rhetorical form of logical claims: see Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: science, hermeneutics and praxis* (Philadelphia, PA: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983).

8   This is the subject of my essay "Compassionate Postmodernism: An Introduction to Rabbinic Semiotics", *Soundings* Vol. LXXVI no.1 (Spring, 1993), pp. 140–152.

9   See, for example, Peirce's "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 6.452–493.

10 That is, the warrants of both prophecy and rational inquiry are displayed in their consequences for public behavior in this world, rather than in self-legitimating intuitions, including those attributed to encounters with God. Peirce's claim may be found in his 1893 note on "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 5.402n2.

11 To be sure, I use poetic license here to summarize a complex characterization of the Peirce-James-Dewey critique of unwarranted abstraction and unresolved argumentation in academic practice. The pragmatists do not insist that every act of theorizing prove itself in the field of practice: only that theorists have no warrant for making claims of truth or falsity except for claims tested by the work of repairing problematic situations or healing wounds in our actual social lives.

12 The Jewish Kantian, Hermann Cohen makes a strong case for this claim: that, while Platonic science provides Kantian ethics with its epistemology, Scriptural prophecy, alone, introduces the object of ethical knowledge (humanity encountered in its suffering) and its purpose (to end this suffering). See, for example, Hermann Cohen, "Classical Idealism and the Hebrew Prophets" in *Reason and Hope: Selections for the Jewish Writings of Hermann Cohen*, trans. Eva Jospe, (New York, NY: Norton, 1971). See discussions of Cohen in Robert Gibbs, *Why Ethics?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), Chapter 13; and Peter Ochs, *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 292–295.

13 *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 6.506–7, from "Answers to Questions Concerning My Belief in God", (c. 1906).
14 For a fine, readable introduction see John Polkinghorne, *Quantum Theory, A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
15 Knowledge, in other words, is *yidia*, or intimacy/intercourse, rather than *gnosis*, in the sense of cognition at a distance (or through identity). Intimacy means *relation*. "Truth", *emet*, is therefore an attribute of "reliability in relation", in that sense, "faith", *emunah*. In *this* sense, "truth is the seal of God".
16 In Michael Fishbane, *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 3–4.
17 I will assume postmodern and postliberal readers share my characterization of the kind of determinism that would lead modernists to criticize abductive reasoning as relativistic. And I assume readers attracted to Radical Orthodoxy share my characterization of postmodern tendencies to opt for this kind of relativism. In a survey of the postmodernists, for example, Frederick Bauerschmidt argues that postmodernism retains "with the modern a sense of the lack of reality of all representation, but it is no longer suspicious of received representations" [since that is all we have]": "The Theological Sublime" in *Radical Orthodoxy: a new theology*, eds. J. Milbank, C. Pickstock, and G. Ward (London: Rutledge, 1999), pp. 202–203. The post-postmoderns I have in mind are Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou. The latter's study of *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003) displays the kind of intuitionism I have in mind and, with it, a binary rejection of abductive, religious thinking—here, in the form of rabbinic legal reasoning. According to Badiou, "the law always designates a particularity, hence a difference. It is not possible for it to be an operation of the One: . . . no evental One can be the One of a particularity." "Legality" is, however, "always predicative, particular, and partial"; it is therefore always "statist", seeking to "control a situation" that cannot ultimately be controlled. (p. 76). "Jewish law" is therefore error, but so is "Greek wisdom": for the one reduces its object of knowledge to "elective belonging", while the other reduces it "to the finite cosmic totality" (p. 56). Grace alone redeems humanity, universally, from either reduction, free of any finite law; and this is Paul's message (p. 77).
18 *Exodus Rabbah* on Exodus 3:13.
19 From the "Blessings before the Sh'ma", in the rabbinic daily prayerbook.
20 Thus, Peirce writes that we "can know nothing except what we *directly* experience", and thus that our idea of God comes from direct experience. "Direct" does not mean immediate, however, in sense of mere intuition: it means that we directly encounter Thirds (triadic relations), that we encounter God's word as such as a Third, and that our understanding of that encounter comes, as all understanding comes, through temporal and social processes of reception, interpretation, testing, and so on. See "A Neglected Argument."
21 See Peirce's writings in phenomenology, for example, *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, 1.334–76.
22 David Ford has made "the cry" a centerpiece of his current work on Wisdom in Christian theology and in scriptural reasoning. His treatment of cry is a primary stimulus to this aspect of my essay.
23 The most thoroughgoing treatment I have seen of this pragmatic use of the interrogative is in Robert Gibbs, *Why Ethics?*, cited above.
24 Participants in both Scriptural Reasoning and Radical Orthodoxy may be challenged at times by the temptation of defending good scriptural readings by way of unnecessarily over-generalized, and thus dyadic, claims. Among Radical Orthodoxy folks, for example, much of John Milbank and also Catherine Pickstock's writing complements SR's critique of modernism and its general project of recovering scriptural faith. When arguing on behalf of the latter, however, they both tend at times to reach for universalistic warrants on behalf of their intuitions of Christ and against all possible alternatives. Thus, for example, much of Pickstock's *After Writing: on the liturgical consummation of philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) also serves SR, as illustrated in phrases like these: "because liturgical space, by its recognition of a transcendent, is not merely scalar, physicality is intensified as much or more by its continuity with a spiritual" (p. 231) and "by deliberately exposing the mechanisms of our 'reason'—as in our syntactic

performance in the *Credo* and *Gloria*—of that which we 'understand' of the Trinitarians relations and the economy of salvation, our apparent human pride is grounded in a supreme and doxological humility" (p. 227). But then the argument ascends, past humility and abduction, to universal/necessary claims based on intuitionism. With Milbank, for example, Pickstock argues not only for the plausibility, power and attractiveness of her formulations of gift ("thus, through Christ, every good thing in transposed into gift", p. 241) but also for the utter uniqueness of that "through Christ": "thus, with Christianity the optimum of meaningfulness and the optimum of living subjectivity coincide with the world" (p. 273). I believe this is a case of assimilating real possibility (a good abduction) to necessity: an unnecessary assimilation for one who writes in faith. One source of the excess can be seen in the tendency to over-draw criticisms of the postmodern, rendering the postmodern X not merely contrary to what we want but also contradictory, so that its negation is equivalent to the good: on the previously mentioned topic of liturgy, for example, she writes "whereas spatialization, in its postmodern consummation, renders absent every present, apostrophe renders present every absent" (p. 194). The latter is a useful abduction, but it becomes reified through the discussion of liturgy into a dogma. The resulting lack of testing leaves the excesses of "*every present*" unrefined to fit the contexts of liturgy as lived and not idealized. Milbank's' discussions of gift are comparable, if more strongly stated. His criticism of modern and postmodern models of gift contribute well to SR, as does his alternative when opposed as a strong abduction: that the Eucharistic "gift given to us of God himself in the flesh" is the "gift of an always preceding gift-exchange", which is the exchange of love between Father and Son, between Being and beings and between Christ and his Church. By participating in Christ, he argues, humanity thereby receives the gift of giving as well as of receiving. (See John Milbank, "Can A Gift be Given?" *Modern Theology* Vol. 11 no. 1 (January, 1995), pp. 119–161; pp. 150–152). But then Milbank extends his abduction into a dogma, as if the language of his claim represented a direct intuition of the divine reality and as if evidence were already given that no other tradition's formulation of gift were equivalent: this gift is given this way in Christ in a way that it could not be given in any other tradition or witness. This extra move leads him, like the post-postmodernists, to seek ways of trumping possible analogues in Greek philosophy and Judaism and then to condemn these where the analogues fail to live up to his model. (See n.17 above and John Milbank, "Can A Gift be Given?".) As unfortunate as are the fruits of these condemnations, the fruit is in this case not my real concern, but rather the logical seed: the effort to over-extend an otherwise helpful analysis and thereby render Christological claims in the form of Cartesian argumentation. Removed from this added packaging, Milbank's claims appear as admirable abductions.

25 Postliberal movements like Scriptural Reasoning and Radical Orthodoxy therefore have at hand an appropriate and effective way to reduce their dyadic tendencies and temptations. This is to turn written and oral discussions away from the presentation of universal claims and the defense of individual claims toward the on-going study of the meaning and force of God's Word for the specific contexts of our lives.