Reparative Reasoning

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> Few persons care to study logic, because everybody conceives himself to be proficient enough in the art of reasoning already. But I observe that this satisfaction is limited to one's own ratiocination, and does not extend to that of other men.
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> C.S. Peirce, 'The Fixation of Belief' (1877)

This is an apt introduction to a discussion of the work of Peter Ochs. First, it rehearses a claim that logic is a neglected topic for study. This was true in 1877, and I daresay it is true in 2008, or at least true of those who consider the interpretation of the Bible. Second, it draws attention to the relation between being satisfied with one's own thinking and a noticeable uncertainty regarding how others think. The lesson drawn from this, which is admirably exemplified in the work of Peter Ochs, is that if one wishes to pay attention to how other people think, the study of logic is indispensable.

This essay falls into two parts. The first part describes some aspects of Peter Ochs' philosophical project in a way that may provoke newcomers to seek it out for themselves. The second focuses more particularly on what I will here call 'reparative reasoning', as exemplified in the final, and seminal, chapter of his most difficult work: *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture*.

This first part considers the shape of what Ochs calls 'scriptural pragmatism'. Scripture is not the most obvious topic to spring to the mind of most persons when asked what, if anything, they have learned from the school of American philosophy called 'pragmatism'. The fact that scripture and logic are pursued by Ochs in such close entanglement is thus unusual.

What makes it pragmatist? For Ochs, scriptural pragmatism stands opposed to the Enlightenment view (Kant) that philosophy's task is to discover the grounds for thinking, or the Rationalist view (Leibniz) that philosophy's task is to clarify the mind's innate knowledge of the world. Instead it supposes, more in the manner of Schleiermacher perhaps, that the inquirer finds herself in the middle of things, and philosophy's task is to make our ideas about those things clearer. The classic Peircean pattern begins with irritation. Irritation gives rise to doubt. Doubt motivates thinking. Thinking produces beliefs which alleviate the doubt. Beliefs issue in habits.

This scheme (irritation-doubt-thinking-beliefs-habits) is familiar to any student of pragmatism. It begins with habits: habits plus an irritation. And it ends with habits: beliefs remove the cause of the irritation and produce new habits. The scheme undergoes a significant modification in Ochs' work. The two terms which change are 'irritation' and 'thinking'. They become 'suffering' and 'scriptural interpretation'. The habits in question are specified historically: they are the habits of a religious community. Faced with suffering, the community's habits of reading scripture are interrupted. The 'plain sense' of scripture is no longer satisfying. To address its suffering, the community seeks increasingly more imaginative interpretations of its texts, so as to find in them some wisdom for changing its habits. Such interpretations, aimed at healing suffering, are termed by Ochs 'pragmatic readings'. The process comes to a temporary close when the community's habits are sufficiently altered to be able to heal the suffering in question.

This is not the end of the matter. Ochs is also interested in a deeper level at which such a 'logic of scripture' operates. Scripture is not only the text to which communities happen to turn, as if other texts might be considered but scripture preferred. Rather, scripture is itself the pattern of the logic of repair itself. The deepest patterns of repair, for a community, are found in scripture. Philosophy thus takes on a notable role. Its job is not primarily to assist the 'pragmatic' interpreter of scripture. Indeed, such an interpreter need know very little of philosophy to do his or her task well. There is no demand for all rabbis to become philosophers. Rather, the task of philosophy is to discern the pattern of the logic of repair found in scripture, and to offer as precise a map as possible for that pattern.

We can thus discern two quite distinct tasks: the broadly pragmatist and the more precisely logical. The pragmatist task identifies the interpretation of scripture to address suffering. The logical task is the identification of the deep patterns of repair exemplified in scripture. Peter Ochs has addressed both tasks; the second is more severely technical, and will probably take longer to be appreciated. Just as Peirce is widely known for his more accessible essays on logic, but is of intense interest to specialists for his more technical pieces – in which many of his more original contributions lie – so perhaps Ochs will be widely known for his account of pragmatic readings of scripture, but be of enduring interest to religious logicians for his innovative investigations into the logic of scriptural repair. For this appreciation to be possible, however, it will be necessary to train theologians more thoroughly in logic.

In Ochs' work, logic maps habits. There is a strong ethnographic dimension to the logician's task, as Ochs practises and conceives it. Logic requires attentiveness to habits. It is not so beguiled by 'accounts' of a practice, such as theologians are trained and delighted to offer. Indeed, there is a strong sceptical thrust to Ochs' engagements with theologians. His leading

tendency is to listen to theological argumentation with great patience and generosity. And then, placing to one side the self-descriptions of his informants, he proceeds to try out his own various descriptions of their habits of thought. Instead of cataloguing their self-descriptions, Ochs behaves more like a social anthropologist, and seeks to reconstruct the kinds of question being asked and answered, rather than taking the question for granted and attending only to the variety of answers given. His logic – his mapping of habits of thought – is not a matter of identifying positions but of showing (in some detail) how certain habits of thinking are answers to questions.

This should not be surprising. Peirce had already identified the multi-step process leading from irritation to the establishment of beliefs guiding habits. Ochs applies this to the work of his theological colleagues: he seeks to identify their irritations and doubts, and to discover what habit-guiding beliefs issue from their deliberations. The effect can be rather unnerving – threatening, even – to theologians used to wrangling over positions.

It is certainly instructive. One of the key questions in which Ochs is interested is how the interpretation of scripture plays (or fails to play) a role in fixing beliefs as a response to doubts and irritations, in particular theologians' work. The other, which follows from what I have already said, is that Ochs is interested in determining what specific forms of suffering give rise to any process of deliberation. Like Peirce, he is ever vigilant for that most greedy time-waster: the paper doubt. Unless a train of reasoning can be described in a way that identifies the real doubt, which for Ochs means human suffering, that motivates the inquiry, any dialogue is of doubtful fruitfulness.

Theologians can appreciate how a practice like 'scriptural reasoning' exemplifies this approach. I am struck by how the combination of a 'pragmatic' reading of scripture and an 'ethnographic' approach to describing the work of theological colleagues creates a certain gravitational force towards a practice like scriptural reasoning.

I mean something like the following. In the reading of Torah, in textual reasoning, Ochs discerns a pattern in which suffering gives birth to doubts about the adequacy of rehearsing the plain sense of scripture; this leads to pragmatic readings in which new interpretations arise, whose purpose is to address the original suffering.

In engagements with Christian theologians, Ochs hypothesises that the same pattern may be at work in their theologies. He thus seeks to identify the real doubts that motivate theological inquiry, and at the same time hypothesises that an analogous logic of scripture underlies the theologian's interpretative habits.

Notice that these are hypotheses. Scriptural reasoning is, in some ways, an experiment in Peirce's sense: it is an ordered arrangements of habits of inquiry designed to test these hypotheses. Are there analogous logics of scripture at work in the three Abrahamic traditions? Are the deepest patterns of repair, in those traditions, to be found in their scriptures? And how can they best be mapped by the logician?

Yet scriptural reasoning is not merely an experiment. For the pragmatist, an experiment's purpose is to test hypotheses in various ways. Once such testing has run its course, to the satisfaction of the lab-worker, the experiment comes to an end. New beliefs are established, and new habits are their fruit. But scriptural reasoning does not come to an end like an experiment. It continues: less like an experiment and more like a laboratory in which various experiments can be pursued.

The analogy with experimentation can be extended. One of the most arresting fruits of Ochs' method arises from the conjunction of scientific inquiry, historical investigation and ethnographic description. Ochs *qua* scientific inquirer fashions hypotheses, in response to real doubts, until new beliefs are established and taken as axioms which guide habits. Ochs *qua* historian investigates his own rabbinic tradition's interpretations of scripture as pragmatic responses to real doubts, issuing in new beliefs taken as axioms which guide habits, within that tradition. Ochs *qua* ethnographer attends to others' practices, which he takes to be responses to real doubts, and reconstructs the ways in which those others establish new beliefs which are taken as axioms which guide habits, within those other traditions.

The fruit of this is best tasted by introducing that most characteristic Ochsian concept: thirdness. It can be stated briefly:

What is taken in one tradition to be axiomatic can be taken in another tradition to be hypothetical. This needs spelling out a little.

The main issue concerns 'intuitions'. Like Peirce, Ochs has nothing against intuitions. Intuitions are solutions to problems that flash into the inquirer's mind with the force of inevitability. It is the 'Eureka!' moment of inquiry. They are the indispensable moment of spontaneity – uncaused and unbound by rules – that brings a train of thought to a temporary close. Intuitions are all well and good. Happy is the one who has many intuitions. But what happens in the case of rival intuitions?

There are those who insist on the rightness of their intuitions, perhaps by arguing that these intuitions sit well with the views (reconstructed by the intuition-holder) of authoritative figures in 'the tradition'. The name of Augustine is often invoked. There are others who eschew all intuitions as 'unscientific'. They seek a cool, objective atmosphere, in which there are no truths which one might inhabit, only the icy air of observation, in which all truth claims are merely phenomena which other people happen to display.

Ochs offers a quite different pattern. Intuitions are a middle part of an investigation, not its terminus. Moreover, your intuitions are not my intuitions. Your axioms are not my axioms. Your hypotheses are not my hypotheses. Talk of axioms and hypotheses admittedly needs some care, in this context. The more usual context for these terms are kinds of proposition and formulations related to scientific research, but that is not solely how they are meant here. Habits too can be taken as axiomatic, in the sense that they are not questioned by those who practise them.

An intuition is a response to a problem. If you do not have that problem then my intuition, which is a response to that problem, has limited significance for you. A problem is a sign that a system of axioms is in crisis. What I expected to see, I did not see. At least one of the practices I take as axiomatic may need to be questioned. In a tradition some axioms are inviolate; others are debatable. If a system of axioms is in crisis, then it is one of the debatable axioms that needs to be converted into an hypothesis and then tested. What is inviolate in my tradition may not be inviolate in your tradition. The axioms we are prepared to convert into hypotheses may be different. In sum:

What is axiomatic for me may be hypothetical for you.
What is hypothetical for me may be axiomatic for you.

Thirdness identifies the 'for you' qualification in such propositions.

In any investigation that is motivated by a problem and a real doubt, intuitions are possible solutions to those problems. Different traditions have different problems, and different intuitions are likely to arise for a particular tradition's investigators. The most damaging presupposition, in the interpretation of scripture in an inter-faith context, is the idea that we have the same problems, the same axioms, the same logics. With this presupposition the idea arises naturally and horribly that rival intuitions must be pitted against each other, and their holders must tough it out in an *agon* of mutually exclusive illuminations. It is likely to be conceived as a fight to the death, because the previous strategy – appealing to authoritative

figures in 'the tradition' – is no longer available. There are now multiple traditions, and not just 'the' tradition, in play.

Not so for Ochs. We may have different problems, different axioms and different logics. But we do not know *a priori* what they might be. Something like ethnographic attentiveness is called for, and its results will be descriptions of various kinds. For Ochs we will best find out where the analogies and disanalogies lie if we read scripture together, against a background of suffering and real doubts.

This second part describes Ochs' 'reparative reasoning'. For our purposes here it embraces the related ideas of 'corrective inquiry', 'pragmatic reasoning', 'restorative reasoning' and 'method of interpretation and repair'. I attempt here a brief commentary on parts of the final chapter of *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture*, entitled 'Pragmaticism reread: from common-sense to the logic of scripture'.[1] For reasons of space, I will focus on the account of corrective reading (252-259) and the discussion of Frei and Lindbeck (305-316).

The overall strategy of *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture*, is to offer different levels of interpretation of Peirce's writings. The aim of these levels of interpretation is the identification of problems of various kinds, accompanied by attempts to solve them. Ochs distinguishes between problems that Peirce himself identified and tried to solve, and problems that Peirce's readers must identify and try to solve. Ochs thus rehearses Peirce's self-criticisms, and tries out a few of his own. This is what one would expect from a study of Peirce. What is less usual is Ochs' detailed categorisation of types of problem, especially problems of vagueness. Ochs is particularly interested in cases where Peirce does not contradict himself, or commit fallacies, but develops arguments which the reader is not in a position to evaluate or test unless he or she introduces criteria for judgement that are not present in or invited by Peirce's own argumentation. Where Peirce is vague, the interpreter must be more specific. Ochs asks: where do such criteria come from, and what good reasons can the critic give for introducing them into discussion? Much of the force of Ochs' own argumentation emerges from the insight that such criteria, and the good reasons given for introducing them, belong in particular contexts of life and practice, and tend not to be generalisable beyond them. Ochs does not just claim this outright, but offers a kind of performance: his own argumentation is offered first to a very general readership, and then that readership is progressively narrowed until – in a way that is probably shocking to many philosophers – he suggests that some claims can only have validity for others in his own tradition, or near it. His most fruitful sources for being concrete where Peirce is vague, his

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[1] Peter Ochs *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge, CUP: 1998), pp.246-325. Page numbers appear in brackets in the main text.

most fruitful criteria for judging the reconstructed arguments, and his best reasons for introducing them, come from being part of an ancient Jewish tradition of worship: he speaks out of it and to it, precisely when he is being most specific in his philosophical reasoning. Ochs' most intimate reasonings about Peirce are, he says, offered to fellow Jews and also Christians who reason in similar ways. Others may find them interesting, the way social anthropologists or tourists find unfamiliar societies interesting, but they are not invited to criticise them as if they were part of those societies. After all, tourists are not asked to perform jury service.

All this is to say that Ochs' reparative reasoning is not like transcendental philosophy or empiricism, which are approaches that intend to commend themselves to anyone, from any tradition, at any time. Reparative reasoning may be interesting to all sorts of people, but the more fruitful its claims, the more limited the readership that will be in a position to take them up. Ochs readily identifies himself as a member of a Jewish tradition that is in relation to Christian traditions, and suggests that his most fruitful reasonings will make fuller sense to other members of those traditions.

The leading metaphor that runs throughout the model of reparative reasoning is that of medicine, although there are others; I have simplified it somewhat. The reader is invited to consider how a physician treats a patient who offers an account of her suffering. There are a number of levels, which I have numbered in order more clearly to see what is going on.

Level 1: the physician hears, in the patient's account, symptoms of an identifiable problem.

At this level if the physician is familiar with an appropriate cure it can be offered to the patient. The physician's existing knowledge of illnesses, combined with a relationship of trust with the patient, skill in diagnosis, and what one might call a certain flair, lead to the ending of the patient's suffering.

Level 2: the physician fails to hear, in the patient's account, symptoms of an identifiable problem.

At this level the physician needs to determine where the problem lies. Does the physician lack knowledge of illnesses that another physician might possess? Is there a lack of trust with the patient? Is the physician insufficiently skilful in diagnosis, or lacking in flair? If it is any of these, then 'the healer needs healing' (254).

Level 3: the physician's failure is attributed to a failure of medicine, rather than the physician's individual practice of it.

At this level it is not the physician who determines where the problem lies, but one who asks about 'the science of medicine'. Ochs observes, 'it is not a question we can address in everyday terms'. Rather, it is a matter for the philosopher: it is philosophy that serves (repairs) the sciences.

There are thus three kinds of 'failure' in view. There is the failure of the patient's body; the failure of the physician's skill; the failure of medicine. Each kind of failure is more radical than the last, and calls for correspondingly deeper reparative reasonings. A physician can repair the patient's body; a better physician can repair a poor physician's failure; a philosopher can repair medicine's failure.

Medicine is a system of repair. Philosophy is a system of repair of systems of repair.

The basic question comes into view clearly: what rules guide philosophy, as a system of repair of systems of repair? The Peirce book, especially its final chapter, is a 'logic' in the sense used earlier: a map of the kinds of rule that Peirce identified, together with some further rules for addressing Peirce's vagueness. Ochs follows Peirce in identifying 'diagrammatic' rules and 'corrective' rules; he learns from Peirce the need to sustain a 'dialogue' between diagramming and correcting (257), and clarifies this by way of 'the logic of scripture', which names the ultimate source of rules for repair of systems of repair.

One can thus discern:

Level 4: medicine's failure is attributed to a failure of philosophy to repair it.

At this level, matters are bleak. The concern to repair philosophy runs through many variants of pragmatism, and indeed through phenomenology, back through transcendental idealism, through various empiricisms and rationalisms. The concern to repair philosophy is as old as Plato. But one should not underestimate how serious things are, in this case. The physician's patient – and countless others like her – are in a nearly hopeless situation if philosophy – the system of repair of systems of repair – itself stands in need of repair.

It is interesting to note that at this fourth level, Peirce's own pragmaticism stands in need of … something. Here is one of Ochs' most radical and interesting claims. Peirce's pragmaticism does indeed stand in need of repair, insofar as it fails to repair philosophy, but

the repair needed is not of the same kind as is called for when medicine fails. *It needs to be rendered less vague.* The repair called for is not 'correction' nor is it 'diagramming'. The plain sense of Peirce's work is, in Ochs' words, 'irremediably vague'. Poring over the texts will only allow the reader to identify more precisely the kind and extent of the vagueness: it will not resolve the problems. The repair called for is a turn to the deepest sources of repair that lie not in philosophy, let alone in medicine (or other sciences), but in… where?

It is this question that the final chapter of *Peirce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scipture* seeks to answer. It is a quick matter to state where the deepest sources of repair lie, for Ochs: they lie in scripture. It is a rather less quick matter to follow Ochs' arguments as to why scripture, rather than, say, common-sense, is where those deepest sources lie. One needs to bear in mind that Ochs does not prestidigitate scripture as a conjuring trick to impress the philosophically untutored. He does not follow the method of creating an imaginary enemy – Philosophy! – which he can heroically rescue with an equally imaginary hero – Scripture! Instead he patiently works through the ways in which various attempts to heal philosophy have over-generalised their criteria (especially in the work of Descartes and Kant) and thus robbed themselves of the ability to own up to their own historical situatedness, and thus be finite and temporary responses to specific problems, rather than universal cures for every problem conceivable.

Reparative reasoning is historically situated, and is thus self-consciously finite and temporary. It operates at one of the four levels (there might conceivably be more than four levels), and if it operates at the fourth, where philosophy stands in need of repair, it must reach deeper than philosophy. 'Scripture', for Ochs, names two kinds of thing, and it is important to distinguish them. Formally it refers to whatever one takes to be the deepest source of repair. In this sense, Plato has scripture: it is what leads him to talk of forms. Materially it refers to the scriptures of Judaism (for Jews) and of Christianity (for Christians) and so on. These are actual bodies of texts that function as the deepest sources of repair for actual bodies of people.

When Ochs suggests that 'scriptural pragmatism' is the most fruitful remedy for Peirce's vaguenesses, he means, to begin with at least, *any* approach that has resources deeper than philosophy, on which one can draw in order to repair philosophy, which repairs medicine, which repairs the art of healing, which repairs suffering bodies. But those deeper resources will be specific to a community, in a more restricted way than philosophy itself, or medicine for that matter. (Of course, philosophy and medicine belong to traditions: it is a question of degree.)

In practice, however, Ochs has too strong an ethnographic instinct to be satisfied with a schematic account like this. This is quite proper, because the schematic account is the product of having considered how particular traditions, with particular scriptures, go about the business of repairing philosophy, medicine, habits and persons. The two traditions he considers are Judaism (through the figures of Cohen, Buber, Rosenzweig, Kadushin and implicitly Ochs) and Christianity (through the figures of Frei and Lindbeck), but they are not chosen because of any *a priori* principle, or because after research they are thought to display suitable characteristics. They are chosen in the Jewish case because Ochs actually belongs to this tradition, and in Christianity's case because it is in relation to Judaism in various ways, and because particular Christians are in relation to Peter Ochs.

What Ochs has to say about Frei and Lindbeck is of considerable interest to theologians, because familiar material is rendered in an unfamiliar way, provoking a reassessment of the contemporary significance of certain aspects of their work. Both figures are described as contributors to a project that 'displays the Rule of Pragmatism' (306). This rule 'cannot be defined' (273): it is operative in actual reparative work done by actual people in actual communities, and it is 'revealed' (Ochs' word) in the patterns of repair that are discerned in scripture. Frei and Lindbeck display the Rule of Pragmatism in a double way: they serve particular communities' habits of repair, and they discern those habits paradigmatically in scripture.

Ochs is quick to observe appreciatively that Frei reasons historically. Particular Christians in particular places (Locke and Latitudinarians in England, Neologians in Germany) at a particular time (the eighteenth century) tried and failed to mediate between the extremes of 'dogmatic' orthodoxy and 'sceptical' naturalism. Frei's interest is obviously reparative. His work is valuable because the failed repair belongs to a history to which contemporary Christians belong, and its continued failure causes suffering in the Church. Frei's description of problems in the eighteenth century is diagrammatical-and-corrective, for the sake of addressing contemporary twentieth century problems.

The attempt to mediate between dogmatic and sceptical thought (whose heirs are fundamentalist and secularist ideologies) pursued a strategy of insisting that the 'content' of religion was 'broader than the Bible'. It failed because the 'rule' (Ochs) that generated the mediations was the same rule that generated the opposition of orthodoxy and naturalism. It was the rule that needed repair, not the opposition, which was just an effect of the rule. What was this rule? *'What the Bible refers to is something 'behind' it'*. In the case of dogmatic orthodoxy this is 'real history'; in the case of sceptical naturalism this is 'not real history'; in

the case of the failed mediating repair this is 'general principles' known independently of scripture.

Frei attempts to repair the rule, rather than offer another failed attempt at mediation which is generated by the rule. *'What the Bible refers to is displayed by how the community of interpreters perform the scriptures, in narrating the person of Jesus Christ, and narrating its own identity as the community of his disciples'* (my gloss, following Nicholas Lash). Frei also diagrams-and-corrects later failed attempts (Ricoeur, Tracy) to repair the mediating theology: failed because they too are products of the unrepaired rule. These failed repairs attribute to scripture an inherent 'power of disclosure' (again, something 'behind' the text) rather than describing the actual practices of interpretation performed by the community.

Lindbeck does something similar. Like Frei he repairs an errant rule, in this case one that generates 'propositionalist' and 'experiential-expressivist' positions: *'What doctrines refer to is something 'behind' them'*. In the propositionalists' case this is 'objective reality'; in the experiential-expressivists' case this is 'core experiences common to all humanity'. Ochs does not say so, but one can make good sense of Lindbeck's critique of Rahner in these terms: Rahner attempts to mediate between propositionalist and experiential-expressivist positions (already an improvement over claims that Rahner occupies the latter position), but that mediating attempt is generated by the same errant rule. Lindbeck's 'cultural-linguistic' approach repairs the rule as follows (again, my gloss): *'What doctrines refer to is displayed by how the community of interpreters perform the scriptures…etc.'* In Ochs' words:

> For the Christian community, the Bible is thus not a sign of some external reality, but a reality itself whose meanings display the doubly dialogic relationships between a particular text and its context within the Bible as a whole, and between the Bible as a whole and the conduct of the community of interpreters (309).

The key to the repairs undertaken by Frei and Lindbeck is what one might call 'the turn to the interpretant': that is, the insistence that meaning is always meaning *for* some community in some context. Repairing rules with this in mind removes the need to insist on privileged access to meanings *behind* the text, or doctrine, or indeed any object: such meanings tend to be insisted on rather strongly, in proportion to how difficult it is to read them off the plain sense of the text.

It is appropriate to end this discussion with what may, in time, come to be seen as Ochs' classic statement of why scriptural pragmatism offers hope, although no guarantees, of a kind

that tends to be missed in philosophical study (or indeed theology) that neglects scripture. It is a kind of 'Prologue to John's Gospel in pragmatist terms'.

> The world of experience is served by a finite set of common-sense beliefs, and there are terrible occasions when this world breaks down and common sense is confounded. There is more than *this* world, however: for scriptural pragmatists there are resources *out* of this world for correcting the inadequacies *of* this world. The source of correction is of this world in the sense that it is written in the language of this world, but it is not only from this world. It is written in texts whose plain sense belongs to everyday language and respects the rules of common sense but which, to the attentive reader, also displays certain errors and vaguenesses that cannot be resolved within the rules of common sense and the terms of everyday language. Discomforted by what appear to be the text's burdens, the attentive reader is stimulated into a process of corrective rereading… [yet] as the process of rereading 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… (319)