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Chapter 5. Formulating Deep Reasonings: Habermas *after* Nicholas Adams

Peter Ochs narrates the practice of Scriptural Reasoning (SR) in relation to the American pragmatism of Charles Sanders Peirce whereas Nicholas Adams seems to think that the theory of communication—found in Jürgen Habermas's philosophy—offers a more helpful philosophical foundation for understanding the practice of SR. While I agree with Adams's turn to Habermas's theory of communication for understanding the practice of SR, in this chapter I demonstrate how Habermas's theory of communication becomes helpful only when we distinguish between two of his (Habermas's) theories: the theory of communicative action and the theory of communicative rationality.

Habermas's theory of communicative action and his theory of communicative rationality are not inter-changeable phrases: readers can have one without the other, and the theories do not necessarily depend on each other. Communicative action concerns how two or more individuals relate to one another in everyday (non-philosophical) interactions—namely through body language and patterns of speech. Communicative rationality is a philosophical theory that seeks to (a) explain the peacefulness of argumentation involving both agreements and disagreements, and (b) the logical tools involved to repair broken forms of argumentation and engagement. Early in his writing career, Habermas concerned himself with systematic "distortions"; later in his career, Habermas takes a decidedly Kantian turn and argues for the rational ability of every individual to use their communicative and rational powers. This means that even if an

individual finds herself in a distorted and problematic system, where there is no *communicative action* occurring, then she can employ her abilities and skills of *communicative rationality* without the need to rely upon the societal system of which she finds herself.

My claim is that SR provides such a context no matter how broken the Abrahamic traditions are, and the thesis of this chapter is that Adams's call for "making deep reasonings public" within the practice of SR requires communicative rationality—not communicative action. This chapter proceeds as follows. First, I articulate the significance of Nicholas Adams's gift of Habermas's philosophy to SR. Second, I explain Adams's use of the phrase "making deep reasonings public" and shift the verb to how SR allows its participants to form or formulate "deep reasonings." Third, I distinguish between the theory of communicative action and the theory of communicative rationality within Habermas's philosophy of communication. Fourth, I synthesize Adams's use of the phrase "making deep reasoning public" with Habermas's theory of communicative rationality. I conclude by reflecting on the significance, within SR, of shifting from Peirce's pragmatism to Habermas's theory of communicative rationality.

[A] Nicholas Adams's Gift of Habermas's Philosophy to Scriptural Reasoning

The Scottish philosophical theologian Nicholas Adams 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.[1] 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 (I narrate the genealogy of the phrase late in this chapter), Adams rightly thinks that it reflects the role of religious reasoning within Habermas's theory of communicative action. Adams gifts Habermas's philosophy of communication to SR in two different publication: the final chapter of *Habermas and Theology* and "Making Deep Reasonings Public" in the edited volume *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*.

Adams concludes his book, *Habermas and Theology*, with a chapter entitled "Scriptural Reasoning and Scriptural Difference." In the preceding chapter, entitled "Narrative and Argument," Adams goes to great lengths to defend the position that the disciplines of philosophy and religious studies need to account for both "argument" and "narrative." Analytic philosophy and a rigid scientific approach to religious studies tend to emphasize "argument," while Continental philosophy and a post-liberal approach to religious studies tend to focus either on "narrative" as a writing style or the study of narratives within philosophical and religious traditions. Adams finds in Habermas's theory of communication a way to hold together both "argument" and "narrative," but he also makes the judgment that Habermas does not remain loyal to his own best insights on holding these two together.[2] Adams concludes the "Narrative and Argument" chapter with the recognition that if we stick with the concepts of "argument" and "narrative," then "argument" will always be given more weight. He says, "*Only* an attention to actual practice can do justice to the relationship between narrative and argumentation."[3] This

[1] In addition to Ochs, Nicholas Adams also mentored me in graduate school at the University of Virginia where he served as Visiting Professor of Philosophical Theology for one year.

[2] Adams writes: "Habermas tries to leave it [narrative] behind by developing a procedural ethics [based on argumentation alone]" (Adams, HT, 220).

[3] Adams, HT, 233.

insight leads Adams to the practice of Scriptural Reasoning because SR attends to *narratives* yet sustains constant *argument* about those narratives and the positions that arise from those narratives.

One way to read Adams's *Habermas and Theology* is to say that Habermas's theory of communication requires a practice like SR precisely because of this balance between "argument" and "narrative."[4] That seems a correct reading. However, I add the claim that SR needs Habermas's theory of communication in the sense that Habermas's theory strengthens and sustains reflections upon the practice of SR. Adams offers three claims relating to what I consider his gifting of Habermas's theory of communication to SR.

First, Habermas's theory of communicative action does not block SR from being understood as a philosophical practice of argumentation. What Habermas's philosophy helps scriptural reasoners recognize is that religious reasoning is both "metaphysical" and "post-metaphysical." SR provides a practice where the metaphysical and the post-metaphysical can be sorted out through a process of argumentation and public debate.

Second, Adams offers a distinction for reflecting on SR found within Habermas's theory of communication. Adams writes:

> **[EXT]**[C]onsider…Habermas's distinction between 'normatively ascribed' and 'communicatively achieved' agreement. It [concerns] the difference between (a) claims which appeal to *already accepted* background assumptions, and which invite a 'yes' response, and for which…a 'no' would be intolerable and (b) claims which invite a 'yes and no' response and which are genuinely open to contradiction. For Habermas, a communicatively achieved 'yes' is hard won, and therefore binds those who agree on it together in some socially significant way.[5]**[/EXT]**

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[4] Note Adams's own claim: "Scriptural reasoning seems to me a be a better practice for coordinating different traditions in genuine argumentation than his [Habermas's] project of discourse ethics" (Adams, HT, 252).

[5] Adams, HT, 247.

Adams struggles in articulating how this distinction applies to SR,[6] but the application seems obvious: the normative ascription of SR concerns how scriptural reasoners treat ancient texts as sacred and worthy of study whereas the communicative achievement concerns the arguments over the meaning and sense of the narratives being studied.

Third, neither Habermas's theory of communication nor the practice of Scriptural Reasoning is subject-centered.[7] Each requires the participants to be "bound" to a greater process of reasoning. In Adams's words: "In Habermas's theory, participants *become bound* by the process of argumentation. In scriptural reasoning, they are *already bound* by their own traditions."[8] Adams goes on to explain how the binding to their own religious traditions gets supplemented by being bound by the process of studying texts together "with members of the other two traditions."[9] Against Habermas, Adams prefers to identify this binding—being bound by the process of studying texts together "with

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[6] Adams's struggle is noteworthy: "Scriptural reasoning offers…[a] bleaker scenario. There is genuine argumentation between participants, and it is by definition across different traditions. Most kinds of 'yes' that arise are certainly hard won in Habermas's sense. But are they 'normativaley ascribed' or 'communicately achieved'? Here scriptural reasoning is an anomaly for Habermas. By 'normatively ascribed', Habermas refers to assumptions *within one tradition* that secure agreement. By 'communicatively achieved', he means the generation of agreement *across* traditions without appeal to norms held to be true in only tradition. But participants in scriptural reasoning acknowledge *only* the norms of their own tradition, and subject them to no higher authority except that of God" (Adams, "Scriptural Difference and Scriptural Reasoning," 247). Adams loads the assumptions against SR here, and he fails his own correct insight—found on the previous page—that what makes SR interesting philosophically is that scriptural reasoners tend not to "use their religious faith as a rhetorical means for blocking requests for reasons" (Adams, HT, 246).

[7] Subject-centered is a phrase often employed by Habermas to articulate the tendency within modern philosophy to give the power of reason to the individual alone, independent of communication and relationality; subject-centered becomes Habermas's shorthand for categorizing the role of rationality and reason in the philosophical theories of Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, David Hume, and Immanuel Kant.

[8] Adams, HT, 248.

[9] Adams, HT, 249.

members of the other two traditions"—with "the possibility of friendship." For Habermas's theory of communication, processes of reasoning do not lead to friendship but to justice, solidarity, and tolerance.[10]

There seems to be three levels of rationality—and its connection with relationality—that arise from this analysis: (1) subject-centered rationality, which does not require relationality; (2) relationship-generated rationality bound by a process of reasoning that leads to justice, solidarity, and tolerance (Habermas's position); and (3) relationship-generated rationality bound by a process of reasoning that makes friendship possible (Adams's position). Reflecting on SR in terms of a relationship-generated rationality, where subjects are bound to one another in a process of reasoning, becomes the primary way in which Adams gifts Habermas's philosophy to SR. Adams does not equate SR with Habermas's theory but, rather, demonstrates how SR walks along with Habermas away from subject-centered rationality and then takes a further step from Habermas's theory of communication toward a consideration of the possibility of friendship.[11]

[A]Making Deep Reasonings Public

[10] For instance, when Giovanna Borradori asks Habermas if the categories of "friendship" and "hospitality" are better, morally, than the notion of "tolerance"—because of the condescending and paternalistic nature of "tolerance"—Habermas never addresses the categories of "friendship" and "hospitality" in his answer (see Habermas, *The Divided West*, trans. Ciaran Cronin, [Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006], 74-75).

[11] Instead of the threesome of justice, solidarity, and tolerance, Adams shrinks Habermasian expectations down to "consensus": "The most striking thing about the context of scriptural reasoning is not consensus but friendship…. Consensus can be measured and managed, and to that extent is an appropriate object of a theory like Habermas's. Friendship is altogether more confusing, and even the most sophisticated philosophical accounts of it somehow repeat the absurdity of the hopeless lover who tries to persuade the other to love him by using arguments…. Friendships is nonetheless the true ground of scriptural reasoning, and who can give a good overview of that?" (Adams, HT, 243). In the next chapter, I attempt an "overview" of friendship as the "ground of scriptural reasoning"; readers will determine if my attempt qualifies as "good."

Adams credits the Christian theologian, C. C. Pecknold, with originating this phrase.[12] In his substantial and wonderful review of Jeffrey Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*, Pecknold makes the following judgment on Stout's book:

> **[EXT]**Stout's real service to religious traditionalists may be to call for a revival in communal scriptural reasoning about public life, not as *the* discursive authority, but as a normed and improvisational discourse which 'makes public' the deepest reasons internal to the great religions.[13]**[/EXT]**

There are several main characters in Stout's *Democracy and Tradition*: Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Dewey, John Rawls, and Richard Rorty from the land of the dead (although Rorty was still alive at the time *Democracy and Tradition* was published); from the land of the living Alasdair MacIntyre, John Milbank, Stanley Hauerwas, and yes Jürgen Habermas. In his review of Stout's book, Pecknold never mentions Habermas's role in *Democracy and Tradition*. Adams, however, corrects the neglect of Habermas's relationship to the phrase coined by Pecknold in the sense that this phrase relates as much to Habermas's theory of communication as it does to Stout's "service to religious traditionalists."[14]

The phrase, "making deep reasonings public," concerns the process of argumentation and communication. Adams claims that he "agree[s] with Habermas: either there really can be argumentation, in which case one should try to give an account…of the reasonings that support it, or there cannot, in which case one must—

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[12] Adams writes: "The sentiment [of making explicit deep reasonings] is Jeffrey Stout's; the phrasing is Chad Pecknold's" (Adams, HT, 241).

[13] Pecknold, "Democracy and the politics of the Word: Stout and Hauerwas on democracy and scripture," in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 59:2, (2006), 209.

[14] See Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1-15.

intolerably—give up on public debate."[15] Giving an account of reasonings that support particular positions becomes a necessary aspect of argumentation within Habermas's theory of communication, and Adams concurs with Habermas on this point. Without such an account, argumentation cannot occur in public contexts. SR ought to be considered a practice within a public context because it does not remain within the bounds of a singular religious tradition. What type of reasoning occurs with the public context of the practice of SR? Adams answers this question with these words: "The process of 'reasoning' is not just the teasing out of interpretive issues, but also the making explicit of 'deep reasonings'."[16] According to Adams, two actions occur within SR: teasing out interpretations and "making explicit…deep reasonings." Together, these two actions get SR on the way to meeting Habermas's theoretical expectations for what constitutes argumentation.

Adams further explains how SR makes deep reasoning explicit. He distinguishes between "(a) definitions, axioms and presuppositions, (b) logics and rules for reasoning, and (c) actual chains of reasoning."[17] He argues that religious traditions encounter one another—in the public context of SR—"with long histories of (c)s, where communal identities are expressed at a profound level."[18] To meet Habermas's standards of argumentation, Adams claims: "It is not just the exposure of (a)s that need to happen in

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[15] Adams, HT, 238.

[16] Adams, HT, 241.

[17] Adams, HT, 242.

[18] Adams, HT, 242.

argumentation; it is the rehearsal of (c)s *as expressions of identity*."[19] SR allows and nurtures such rehearsal of "expressions of identity." Adams explains: "Scriptural reasoning is a practice of 'publicising' deep reasonings, so that others may learn to understand them and discover why particular assumptions are attractive or problematic. *Scriptural Reasoning makes deep reasonings public*."[20] By applying these distinctions to the practice of SR, SR fulfills Habermas's theoretical expectations for argumentation—for giving "an account…of the reasonings that support" the claims that accompany the two actions of teasing out interpretations and "making explicit…deep reasonings."

He does not stop here. Adams says that SR takes a further step than Habermas's theory of communication requires in the sense that SR sees "deep reasonings" not as "obstacles to debate, but as conditions for conversation, friendship, and mutual understanding."[21] Adams remains committed to this third level of forging friendship through the practice of SR—which goes beyond Habermas's expectations for and standards of justice, solidarity, and tolerance.

This difference between Adams's expectations of friendships and Habermas's standards of justice, solidarity, and tolerance takes an even sharper turn when Adams introduces the role that vulnerability plays in the practice of SR. Adams writes:

> **[EXT]**Depth is not obscurity…: the acknowledgement of depth is a recognition that it takes time to plumb. Scriptural reasoning models the discovery that making deep reasoning public is not only risky—because one makes oneself vulnerable when revealing what one loves—but time-consuming.[22]**[/EXT]**

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[19] Adams, HT, 242.

[20] Adams, HT, 242.

[21] Adams, HT, 242.

[22] Adams, HT, 242.

Adams identifies three characteristics of SR as a practice of argumentation and communication, and these characteristics involves the demands it makes of its participants: it becomes "risky" for its participants; it makes its participants "vulnerable" to one another; and it requires perseverance of its participants because it is a "time-consuming" practice. Although vulnerability is not the focal point of this passage, reflecting on the role of vulnerability helps clarify the ways in which Habermas's and Adams's arguments differ in terms of their expectations relating to argumentation and communication.

Professor of Communication at the London School of Economics, Lilie Chouliarki, rightly claims that while "Habermas's work centrally engages with questions of justice and solidarity, he [Habermas] is suspicious of the role that human vulnerability may play as an act of cosmopolitan education in the West."[23] She offers two reasons relating to Habermas's suspicions about vulnerability.[24]

> **[EXT]**Assuming that linguistic interaction is the means by which the public sphere coordinates action-in-the-world, Habermas regards human vulnerability as an obstacle to such coordination, in that it displaces questions of justice and solidarity onto a benevolent but de-politicized welfare state, while its mediation relies on an inauthentic visuality that sensationalizes rather than rationalizes its cause. The public sphere that is presupposed and reproduced in this process remains, consequently, restricted to the nation-states and solidarity is understood as unmediated dialogue within the nation-state, inevitably leaving distant others the public scope's of responsibility.[25]**[/EXT]**

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[23] Chouliarki, "Mediating Vulnerability: Cosmopolitanism and the Public Sphere," in *Media, Culture, Society*, 35:1, (2013), 106.

[24] She actually gives the two reasons twice within her essay: once more simplified and another time more complex. For purposes of this chapter, I quote in the body the more complex set of reasons because it introduces Habermas's theory of communicative action in a more explicit way. The more simplified version reads: "The politics of vulnerability, he argues, limits rather than enchances our 'responsibility to act in the world': on the one hand, it turns questions of inequality into the consumption of state services for the poor and, on the other, it lends itself to media manipulation, replacing the moral force of suffering with television spectacle" (Chouliarki, "Mediating Vulnerability," 107). I return to these words later in this chapter.

[25] Chouliarki, "Mediating Vulnerablity," 109.

Habermas's concern with expecting vulnerability involves how vulnerability replaces justice and solidarity.

So far in this chapter, I have asserted over-and-over that Adams *adds* another layer to Habermas's theory of communication—one that involves the expectations of friendship and vulnerability. It turns out, however, that this third layer is not only unwelcomed within Habermas's theory of communication but serves as a threat to his own expectations of and standards for justice, solidarity, and tolerance. If this is all there is to say about the matter, then it seems that Adams has described SR in terms that counter Habermas's theory of argumentation and communication. It becomes clear, on Adams's account, that making deep reasonings both explicit and public—within the practice of SR—requires vulnerability on the part of the participants. Does this requirement of vulnerability shut down the possibility of Habermas's philosophy serving the interests and purposes of SR? I address this question in the next section; before that, however, I raise one criticism of Adams's use of the phrase "making deep reasonings public" in describing the practice and process of SR.

Why making deep reasonings public? Adams's answer seems to be that this phrase captures the process of SR, and making deep reasonings public results in friendship among the participants of this process. On the contrary, I say that SR does not allow participants to *make* their "deep reasonings public" but to publicly formulate what their deep reasonings might be or become. This returns us to the playful aspect of SR. The phrase "make deep reasonings public" sounds assertive, intuitive, and overly confident in one's own beliefs and ways of reasoning; SR, rather, encourages hypothesis-making, musement, and taking guesses about texts say and mean—this playfulness aids

participants in formulating what might become "deep reasonings," but one of the main purposes of the practice of SR concerns how the practice itself repairs the "deep reasonings" that we hold resulting from subject-centered rationality. Adams emphasizes how "making deep reasonings public" within the practice of SR leads to the "definite end" of friendship; I wish to focus on the playfulness of the practice of SR where it becomes a practice that gives religious believers space and time to *formulate* their deepest reasonings in communicatively rational ways.[26]

[A]Distinguishing Communicative Action from Communicative Rationality[27]

Returning to the question, does this requirement of vulnerability shut down the possibility of Habermas's philosophy serving the interests and purposes of SR?

Lilie Chouliarki gives her own judgment on Habermas's suspicion of vulnerability: "What is missing from Habermas's account is an assumption of language not only as a means of coordinating 'action-in-the-world' but also as…a means of 'disclosing worlds'."[28] This critique leads to thinking about Habermas's theory of communicative action. Habermas's concerns with vulnerability relate more concretely to his theory of communicative *action*, and Chouliarki rightly regards Habermas's failure to shift from "'action-in-the-world'" to "world-disclosure." However, I think that

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[26] If the verb "making" is taken as "in the making," then formulating and making might not be as far a part as I suggest here. For the role of "in the making" within modern philosophy, Miner's *Truth in the Making*, (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[27] Some of the material within this section is published in Goodson, "Communicative Reason and Religious Faith in Secular and Post-Secular Contexts," in *The Oxford Handbook on Secularism*, ed. Shook & Zuckerman, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), chapter 19.

[28] By the phrase "disclosing worlds," Chouliarki quotes S. White's definition: "its capacity to loosen our own world's hold on us by calling attention to the ways in which our own unrecognized fictions structure the world and expose the Other who is necessarily created by our world" (Chouliarki, 109; quoting White, "Post-structuralism and Political Reflection," in *Political Theory*, 16:2 [1988], 196).

Habermas's theory of communicative rationality gets us to "world-disclosure"—which means that we must distinguish between these two theories in order to consider whether Habermas's philosophy serves the interests and purposes of SR.

While the theories of communicative action and communicative rationality are related by an adjective, they have differing functions and divergent purposes. Scholarship on Habermas's theories of communicative action and communicative rationality tends to use these phrases interchangeably,[29] which is a mistake. One of the difficulties of reading Habermas's work is that he, himself, fails to distinguish between communicative action and communicative reason; at times, he uses them interchangeably providing neither explanation nor justification for doing so.

There are three key differences between these two theories: (1) communicative action concerns and describes the everyday life or ordinary experiences of present-day citizens whereas communicative rationality names the specific process of argumentation and communication that pulls itself out of the ordinary experiences of citizens; (2) communicative action is context-dependent whereas communicative rationality is an obligation or responsibility of the most intellectual or "rational" citizens—especially scholars in college and university settings; and (3) communicative rationality, not communicative action, leads to and requires Discourse Ethics.

Habermas's theory of communicative action and his theory of communicative

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[29] The exception to this is found in Andrew Edgar's *Habermas: The Key Concepts*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), 21-26. The task of having to write a dictionary or lexicon requires clarifying distinctions whereas lengthy discussions and explanations of those theories do not always invite such clarity. Their differences did not occur to me until I had to sit down to write on the relation between Habermas's post-secularism and his theory of communicative rationality, and the first realization I had was that action and rationality should not be convertible terms as they name two different arenas of human life.

rationality are not inter-changeable phrases. Communicative action addresses what people do within society, whereas communicative rationality advances debates concerning the role of objectivity and reason in the natural sciences and the social sciences. According to Habermas, the natural sciences generate monological-based claims developed through instrumental reason whereas the social sciences proceed along a course closer to the hermeneutical task where there is a necessary give-and-take through argumentation, conversation, and debate. The inter-subjectivity of communicative rationality leads to temporary judgments of objectivity. Objectivity is not defined in an Aristotelian sense of correspondence with objects but, rather, as the result of a long process of argumentation and scholarly debate where "better arguments" are considered final—and, therefore, temporarily objective—until the next generation of scholars re-open investigation. The natural sciences need the argumentative and communicative methods found within the social sciences, and the social sciences ought to be more serious about in-depth and purposive investigations.

Communicative rationality serves as a correction to subject-centered rationality. What is the correction? In Habermas's own words: "The change of paradigm from subject-centered to communicative reason...encourages us to resume...the counterdiscourse that accompanied modernity from the beginning.... It must be made clear that the purism of pure reason is not resurrected again in communicative reason."[30] Communicative rationality builds from the arguments that comprise Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* but avoids Kant's own subject-centered epistemology.

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[30] Habermas, "An Alternative Way Out of the Philosophy of the Subject: Communicative verses Subject-Centered Reason," in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence, (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1990), 301.

Communicative reason leads to Habermas's theory of Discourse Ethics in order to maintain standards of goodness and truthfulness within the process of argumentation, conversation, and debate. Communicative action relies on the traditional moral theories—deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue—and does not necessarily lead to or require Discourse Ethics.

In Habermas's early work, the notion of "the ideal speech situation" functioned as the ultimate standard for communicative rationality; this notion, however, does not remain in Habermas's later work. In his later work, Habermas takes a decidedly Kantian turn in his Discourse Ethics and seeks to apply both "the dignity test" and "the universalization test" to communicative reason.

The "dignity test" guides the theory of communicative rationality because it reminds participants to not use other interlocutors as a means to your own intellectual end. The "universalization test" serves the theory of communicative rationality because it leads to moral consensus: a scholarly decision is valid if and only if every individual affected by the decision consents to it in some way—hence Adams rightly points that Habermas seeks "consensus" in his philosophy of communication.

Whereas the "dignity test" relates to the other participants in the process of communicative reason, "the universalization test" reaches those within society that scholarly decisions might impact—both in the present and in the future. The role of "the universalization test" explains why Habermas cares so much—in his 21st century writings—about religious believers: they, too, have to be able to consent to the conclusions and findings resulting from the process of communicative reason.

The university setting becomes the primary context where communicative reason is achieved and modeled. Habermas writes:

> **[EXT]**'Rationality' refers in the first instance to the disposition of speaking and acting subjects to acquire and use fallible knowledge.... Subject-centered reason finds its criteria in standards of truth and success that govern the relationships of knowing and purposively acting subjects to the world of possible objects or states of affair. By contrast, as soon as we conceive of knowledge as communicatively mediated, rationality is assessed in terms of the capacity of responsible participants in interaction to orient themselves in relation to validity claims geared to intersubjective recognition. Communicative reason finds its criteria in the argumentative procedures for directly or indirectly redeeming claims to propositional truth, normative rightness, subjective truthfulness, and aesthetic harmony.[31]**[/EXT]**

Scholars in the natural sciences ought to maintain their goals for "propositional truth" and "normative rightness" but should do so in communicative relation to scholars working in the social sciences. Scholars in the social sciences should continue their examinations of "subjective truthfulness" and "aesthetic harmony" but should do so in a communicative relation to scholars working in the natural sciences. One of the goals of academic life involves achieving a coherent, consensus-building, and unifying discourse where scholars are freed from their own subjectivities and work toward particular conclusions reached through the process of communicative rationality. In order to achieve this goal, scholars need to (a) cultivate a "decentered understanding of the world" and (b) participate in the process of a "pragmatic logic of argumentation" where research, teaching, and writing lead to normative judgments that can be shared through particular conclusions reached via the process of communicative rationality across disciplines.

[A]Deep Reasonings and the Theory of Communicative Rationality

Simply put, Habermas's theory of communicative action would be the one best applied to the activities within religious traditions and the dynamics at work when

[31] Habermas, "An Alternative Way of the Philosophy of the Subject," 314-315.

members of different religious traditions encounter one another in the routines of their daily lives. Habermas's theory of communicative rationality would be the one best applied to discursive practices of argumentation and communication that are separate from the routines of our daily lives and more academic in nature and purpose.

With this distinction in place, SR clearly fits the latter: the theory of communicative rationality. Since the word "clearly" risks fallacious thinking,[32] for simplicity's sake I quote Adams's own observation: "Scriptural reasoning is…not a focal practice for its participants, but an extension…that is not necessarily warranted by the theologies of the participants' traditions, and may—on certain interpretations—even be forbidden by them."[33] For readers who prioritize simplicity in arguments, then this explanation suffices (skip over the next few paragraphs).

To put it much more complexly: the fact that the religious traditions are broken means that intellectuals within religious traditions need an academic outlet for the sake of exercising their own rationality. SR sessions provide such an outlet to their participants. For Habermas, the university setting becomes the primary context where communicative reason gets achieved and modeled. For religious believers both within and without the university, SR sessions offer a public context and setting where making deep reasonings explicit can be achieved, modeled, and shared no matter how broken the religious

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[32] According to the rules of modern logic, words like "clearly" and "obviously" signal the possibility of the proof surrogate fallacy within an argument.

[33] Adams, "Scriptural Difference and Scriptural Reasoning," 240. Adams continues: "Scriptural reasoning thus means, for its participants, acknowledging that their particular traditions do not encourage their joint reading of scripture, but doing it anyway" (Adams, HT, 240).

traditions of which the participants are members.[34]

In his essay entitled "Making Deep Reasonings Public," Adams claims that participants in SR do not "claim any special theological or textual expertise, and this renders them vulnerable to in an academy for which expertise is the goal of study, and in an educational milieu for which information is the most highly prized commodity."[35] This means that SR is much more like Habermas's theory of communicative rationality because Habermas, himself, displays distaste for the over-specialization of the modern academy where monologues occur more than dialogues between several disciplines. According to Habermas, one of the goals of academic life concerns the achievement of a coherent and unifying discourse where scholars are freed from their own subjectivities and work toward particular conclusions reached through the process of communicative rationality. In order for this achievement to occur, scholars need to (a) cultivate a "decentered understanding of the world" and (b) participate in the process of a "pragmatic logic of argumentation" where research, teaching, and writing lead to normative judgments of which can be shared through the particular conclusions reached through the process of communicative rationality across disciplines. For different purposes but in similar ways, SR (a) decenters our understanding of these texts—which I link with Adams's emphasis on teasing out interpretations and (b) encourages participation in what Habermas means by a "pragmatic logic of argumentation"—which relates to "making explicit…deep reasonings."

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[34] In Adams's words: "Scriptural reasoning models a practice of making deep reasonings public, by offering a forum, in which mutual learning of languages takes place, unpredictably, among friends, to which an open invitation is extended to those who are interested to participate" (Adams, MDRP, 54).

[35] Adams, MDRP, 56.

What is the risk of *not* having either a practice or a process where religious believers have an "extension" (Adams's word) or an outlet (my word) for what is akin to communicative rationality? Both Adams and Chouliarki provide similar answers relating to the educational system, the media, and the nation-state. Chouliarki claims that Habermas's philosophy shows deep concern for and wants to protect against both "questions of inequality" being turned "into the consumption of state services for the poor" and the manipulation of the media where "the moral force of suffering" gets replaced "with television spectacle." Similarly, Adams defends the claim that maintaining a practice that makes deep reasonings explicit and public protects against how "radio and television" tend to report on "religious attitudes" in ways that are "insufficiently informative about…religious attitudes, "and it is sometimes a wonder that such debates are considered at all worthwhile."[36] Adams goes a step further and offers the judgment: "Given the religious difficulties surrounding foreign policy, school education, and domestic and international law, it is surely a significant problem if the deep reasonings of religious traditions are not made public."[37] For me, this insight turns SR into a pedagogical call to arms (in the sense of a summons to engage in an activity or a practice in order to respond to a political crisis or political problems in general).

There are several implications concerning the strong link between Habermas's theory of communicative rationality and the practice of SR in terms of serving as

[36] Adams, MDRP, 55.

[37] Adams, MDRP, 55.

corrections to subject-centered rationality.[38] This correction to subject-centered rationality—his theory of communicative rationality—leads to Habermas's Discourse Ethics in order to maintain standards of goodness and truthfulness within the process of argumentation, conversation, and debate. Like religious traditions actively borrow from and build upon the traditional moral theories of deontology, utilitarianism, and virtue, communicative action relies on these moral theories as well. Discourse Ethics avoids the subject-centered rationality of Kant's deontological reasoning and takes a communication-based deontological approach by applying both "the dignity test" and "the universalization test" to the process of rational deliberation.

Observers and participants of SR will find these tests present at the table of study: the "dignity test" is found within the practice of SR when participants refuse to use other interlocutors as a means to their own intellectual end; the "universalization test" is found within the practice of SR—not through a process of "consensus"—but when participants treat the passages in front of them as "sacred" even when those passages come from texts that they might not consider sacred. (In this chapter, I simply assert this to be the case; in the conclusion of this companion, however, I provide a thorough explanation of SR through the lens of Kant's categorical imperatives.) Through these two deontological "tests," SR maintains standards of goodness and truthfulness within the process of argumentation, conversation, and debate *with* members of other religious traditions and around objects of study considered sacred *by* those religious believers (participating in SR) and by religious traditions in general.

[38] I attempt to perform what Adams claims about reflecting upon the practice of SR: "Scriptural reasoning is a 'fact': it actually happens. It can thus be investigated, and not only by its own participants. Theoretical claims about it can be formulated, and not only by its participants" (Adams, MDRP, 56).

With these arguments, we arrive at a potential middle-ground between Habermas's refusal of friendship and vulnerability and Adams's over-confidence in friendship and vulnerability occurring within the practice of SR.[39] From a Habermasian perspective, participants who follow the dignity test in the process of communicative rationality should not be at risk for becoming friends because of the professional demands required for communicative rationality to work. From Adams's perspective, friendship seems inevitable within the practice of SR because making "deep reasonings public…foster[s] forms of collegial friendship by deepening relations between persons with respect to sacred texts."[40] Habermas prioritizes the goals of "consensus" and "objectivity," over "collegial friendship," within the process of communicative rationality; recognizing that SR would be a completely different practice if "consensus" and "objectivity" were goals at all within the practice of SR (I challenge Adams on this point in the final section of this chapter), Adams opts for friendship as a possible goal—which results from "deepening relationships" but not as a substitute for showing other participants dignity.

My argument is that the "dignity test" within the context of SR might lead to friendship but reminds us of the high importance of treating other participants with dignity by refusing to make them merely a means to your own end. Furthermore, the universalization test provides a deontological rationale for a category such as vulnerability: participants make themselves vulnerable to the sacred texts of other religious traditions. (More on this in the conclusion.)

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[39] I believe this middle-ground position best represents Mike Higton's and Rachel Muers's textual representation of a SR session found in TP, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Press, 2012), chapter 9.

[40] Adams, MDRP, 56.

This seems like a middle-ground position between Adams and Habermas in the sense that vulnerability gets postured toward the shared object of study rather than other people, but the dignity test keeps other participants in check to not manipulate and misuse the vulnerability displayed toward the object of study—the passages on the table from traditionally sacred texts. The comparison of the practice of SR with the process of communicative rationality teaches us that vulnerability can be directed toward objects of study while "collegial friendship" might result from a practice or a process that intensely demands maintaining dignity between participants.

[A]Taking Stock of the Role of Philosophy within Scriptural Reasoning

In his chapter in *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, David Ford writes:

> **[EXT]**At the beginning [of SR] the most influential theoretical contribution was Peter Ochs's use of C. S. Peirce's semiotics and relational logic, and that has continued to be a fruitful resource…. Nicholas Adams has engaged in critical discussion with Jürgen Habermas in dialogue with German Idealist philosophy from Kant to Schelling and Hegel….
>
> Such variety shows the capacity of scriptural interpretation to stimulate conceptual thinking in dialogue with pragmatism, idealism, phenomenology, social theory, legal theory, scientific theory, ethical theory, philosophy of language, philosophy of history, systems thinking, feminist theory, and hermeneutical philosophy. The very diversity also resists any theoretical overview—there can be no overall master theory where so many conceptual descriptions and analyses engage with each other. The intersection of such theoretical accounts also intensifies the conversation around scriptural texts and their implications.
>
> So the effort to "make deep reasonings public"…simultaneously leads deep into scriptures and deep into theories….[41]**[/EXT]**

So what is the difference between theorizing about SR in terms of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality rather than Peirce's pragmatism? By answering this question and stating the difference between the two, I intend to simply keep the difference as *a* difference—and not to suggest a critique of Peirce's pragmatism via Habermas's theory

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[41] Ford, IW, 17-18.

of communicative rationality. I also use this question to introduce more aspects of Peirce's pragmatism that relates to the practice of SR. The difference involves the relationship between consensus, the process of rationality, and Reality.

On the one hand, Peirce's pragmatism seems to be simultaneously both underwhelming in terms of measuring success and overwhelming in terms of the ultimate goal. In terms of the ultimate goal, Peirce thinks that the scientific process of rationality will result in Reality—in the metaphysical realist sense of Reality. In my judgment, SR cannot even begin to make promises about how its practice will someday come to the Reality of divine revelation. In terms of measuring success, Peirce has no category similar to Habermas's view of consensus as a way for us to judge whether the process works in the here and now. Peirce's pragmatism expects those within the scientific process of rationality to continually postpone judgment about the success of the process. I believe that those who practice SR tend to follow Peirce's postponement of judgment about the "success" of SR study sessions.

Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, on the other hand, allows us to judge whether the process works in the here and now. Scriptural reasoners ought to become more comfortable—in specific settings—with claiming Habermasian "consensus." It has become quite commonplace amongst scriptural reasoners to say that Nicholas Adams demonstrates that the goal of SR is "friendship" and "not consensus," but I believe we overstate our case. Adams's actual published words are: "The process [of SR] cannot be rushed. That means that…the urgent need for consensus should not be allowed to force the pace of making deep reasonings public."[42] Adams rightly cautions

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[42] Adams, MDRP, 56.

that we should not forcefully "making deep reasonings public" based upon the urgency of "consensus," but this does not provide grounds to dismiss "consensus" wholesale within SR. The consensus sought within SR is neither doctrinal agreement nor metaphysical finality but, rather, consensus concerning whether the practice ought to continue—perhaps at other places and in other times. This type of consensus follows from the "dignity test" within SR, in the sense that SR neither coerces nor forces the practice of SR onto its participants. Consensus merely follows from the ethical orientation of maintaining dignity that taken toward one another within SR.

Furthermore, Habermas's theory of communicative rationality does not require thinking in terms of an ultimate goal as coming to agreement on Reality "in the long run" (as Peirceans are apt to say).[43] Putting this demand aside ought to free scriptural reasoners because if they do believe, with Peirce, that we will come to know the truth of Reality "in the long run" then that ought to remain a tradition-specific enquiry—and not one that rests upon and within the practice of SR.[44] Habermas's theory of communicative rationality comes with expectations that are less overwhelming, in terms of coming to know Reality through the process of reasoning, and more helpful in the present moment for judging the success of the process of reasoning.[45]

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[43] There are three places where Habermas writes on Peirce's theories of Reality and Truth: *Knowledge and Human Interests*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), chapter 5; *Legitimation Crisis*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975), 108; and *Truth and Justification*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003), chapter 2.

[44] See Adams, HT, 238.

[45] Tom Rockmore summarizes Habermas's thinking on these issues with great clarity: "Habermas regards Peirce as the first to see that knowledge relies on uncompelled and permanent consensus in the form of an ultimate answer to every scientific question…. Habermas's account of Peirce is intended to call attention to his [Peirce's] relation to Habermas's own version of the consensus theory of truth—[which] suggests an anti-Platonic, quasi-Kantian idealist claim according to which independent reality is not grasped as it is but is in some sense 'constructed' by the knower as a condition of knowledge. He [Habermas] goes on to argue that interpretation is based on consensus within the framework of tradition…. Habermas, who wisely

Both of these aspects aid reflections on the practice of SR quite well because Habermas's theory of communicative rationality (a) helps us recognize that continuing to pursue SR as a process of reasoning means that we have consensus that the practice remains worthy of our intellectual investment and (b) rids the potential (Peircean) assumption of thinking that SR will someday reveal the truth of Reality.

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denies the very idea that we in some way grasp mind-independent reality as it is, intends his claim [against Peirce] as a revised form of the Socratic assumption, which functions normatively in the entire philosophical tradition, of dialogue as a source of truth…" (Rockmore, "The Epistemological Promise of Pragmatism," in *Habermas and Pragmatism*, ed. Mitchell Aboulafia, Myra Bookman, & Catherine Kemp, (New York: Routledge Press, 2002), 56.