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Steven Kepnes
Colgate University

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INTRODUCING THE JOURNAL OF TEXTUAL REASONING: REREADING JUDAISM AFTER MODERNITY

STEVEN KEPNES

Colgate University

The movement of Textual Reasoning (started by Peter Ochs, Robert Gibbs, and myself) has functioned for over a decade on the Internet, at meetings of the American Academy of Religion and the Association for Jewish Studies, as well as at special conferences especially devoted to Textual Reasoning. Peter Ochs began the original journal, called the "Postmodern Jewish Philosophy Bitnet Journal," with a list-serv chatline that quickly grew to over 300 participants. After a name change to Textual Reasoning (TR) Aryeh Cohen, Shaul Magid, and Nancy Levene edited the online journal and Michael Zank established a website that he continues to run out of Boston University. In March of 2000, we formalized our movement and the Society of Textual Reasoning was founded at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. At that point, we also decided to seek a professional publisher for our journal which Shaul Magid and I agreed to edit together with our associate editor, Martin Kavka. We were pleased to find the Electronic Text Center at the University of Virginia as our publisher.

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This first issue of the new E-Journal of Textual Reasoning aims to present the current theoretical thinking on the nature and purposes of Textual Reasoning. I asked Peter Ochs, Robert Gibbs, and Aryeh Cohen to supply us with representative statements and both members of our society and outside figures have provided us with commentaries. There have been a number of other published attempts¹ to define the presuppositions and purposes of TR, but the present attempt shows both significant development and clarity.

In what follows I will try to provide something of a history and analysis of TR theory beginning with antecedents in 20th-century Ethical Monotheism and moving through hermeneutical philosophies of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer and the cultural-linguistic religious theory of George Lindbeck to the semiotics of C.S. Peirce. I then attempt to use the essays of Gibbs, Ochs, and Aryeh Cohen to critique and carry forward earlier TR theories. I suggest that we can use Levinas's ethical vision of attending to the suffering of the other as our over-arching goal. I also offer William James's three criteria of truth: "immediate luminosity," "philosophical reasonableness", and "moral helpfulness"² as a way of organizing current TR theory.

Robert Gibbs's essay begins with a list which roughly delineates what is meant by postmodernity: "the end of the subject, the loss of faith in absolutes, the collapse of master narratives, the moment after the Shoah (1)." I would suggest that rather than exploring this series of losses and collapses, Textual Reasoning assumes them and seeks constructive

¹ See Steven Kepnes, Peter Ochs, and Robert Gibbs, *Reasoning After Revelation: Dialogues In Postmodern Jewish Philosophy* (Westview, 1998), Peter Ochs, "B'nei Ezra: An Introduction to Textual Reasoning," in *Contemporary Jewish Theology: A Reader*, Elliot Dorff and Louis Newman, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 502-11, and Nancy Levene and Peter Ochs, *Textual Reasonings: Jewish Philosophy and Text Study After Modernity* (London: SCM, 2002).

² William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin, 1982), 18.

solutions to them for the sake of Judaism, for philosophy, and for the world. Gibbs's essay, highlighting the thought of Emmanuel Levinas as it does, sits in the traditions of Ethical Monotheism and Continental Jewish Philosophy, which have held an important place in our movement since its beginnings. The Jewish neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen and the Jewish existentialism of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig set in place a dual project of revisioning contemporary Judaism and refashioning modern philosophy. This dual project established ideals, principles, and methods that provided important starting points for Textual Reasoning. The Cartesian rational cogito and the Kantian autonomous ethical subject that were so important to modern philosophy placed the rational thinking subject at the foundation of the modern quest for philosophical certitude and ethics. These philosophical moves along with political philosophies of right helped emancipate modern Jews from coercive political and religious authorities and secure civil rights for them. But many postmodern critics have risen up to decry the inability of the rational subject to deliver on its philosophical and ethical promises. In the case of the modern Jews, autonomy has won them certain cherished freedoms, but also isolated them from community and from Jewish tradition, with negative philosophical and existential consequences.

Cohen, Buber, and Rosenzweig were early precursors to postmodern philosophy because they began the attempt to respond to the problematic of the autonomous individual. They did this by simultaneously preserving its integrity and placing it in relationship to others, to the world, and to God. Their philosophical writings argued for these relationships in terms that were abstracted from the Jewish tradition, but their Jewish writings made it clear that the vehicles to channel these relationships were Jewish texts and rituals. Thus, the modern autonomous Jew was to reencounter the tradition through reading texts and participating in Jewish rituals. But these were not meant as isolated acts of the individual, rather, they were to be performed in community with others. Buber's notion of "dialogue" and Rosenzweig's "speech-thinking" suggested a dynamic, social, and performative dimension to Jewish philosophy which has been central to Textual Reasoning from its

inception. We have tried, as much as possible, to do Jewish thinking through oral face-to-face or written email dialogues on Jewish texts. And though the initial inspiration may have come from Buber and Rosenzweig, we were aware that the richest models for dialogue in the Jewish tradition came from the Talmud and its commentaries. We therefore invited Jewish scholars of Talmud and to join with us engage us in group study sessions. This turn to face-to-face dialogue about traditional texts has been a self-conscious response to an inherent problem in the modern Jewish philosophical project.

Hermann Cohen followed Moses Mendelssohn before him in attempting to construct a Judaism that responded to the challenge of the enlightenment. This not only required a more rational Judaism but, for Cohen in particular, a Judaism that responded to the Christian and Kantian concerns that the particularity of Judaism was anathema to a modern universal ethics. Cohen met this critique by stressing the biblical commands to love the stranger, the prophetic demand to attend to the poor, and the messianic vision of universal brotherhood. Thus, far from closing themselves off from gentiles and worrying only about fellow Jews, Cohen's neo-Kantian Jew was fundamentally concerned with helping the Christians and non-Jews of the world achieve the ideals of ethical monotheism.

Cohen's Judaism had decidedly political and even practical concerns. Buber and Rosenzweig shared these concerns and this has given modern Jewish thought a practical and political dimension which remains central to the work of Textual Reasoning. Yet there are significant ways in which Textual Reasoning has endeavored to go beyond the canons of modern Jewish thought, in its methods of studying Judaism and in the scope of modern Jewish philosophy's ethical vision. Hermann Cohen was self-consciously an idealist and, despite their claims to eschew idealism in order to embrace religious experience and Jewish religious myth, there are idealist aspects of Buber's and Rosenzweig's approaches to Judaism. When applied to Judaism, idealism involved the attempt to delineate the "essence of Judaism" in the terms of philosophical metaphysics, ethics, social theory, and aesthetics. This involved downplaying—or even

ignoring—the irrational, unethical, and unaesthetic aspects of Judaism as non-essential or secondary aspects from the historical past. We see this clearly in Cohen's *Religion of Reason*, in Buber's writings on Hasidism, and in Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*. These writers each wrote in times of heightened anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism and, as Jewish leaders, they felt compelled to quell rather than fan the flames of anti-Semitism. This led to a kind of idealization of Judaism in the language of their immediate philosophical context, giving their thought a decidedly apologetic tone.

Textual Reasoners, however, write in a different atmosphere, namely the wide acceptance of Jewish studies in the university community. The authors refuse to limit Judaism to those aspects that serve apologetic functions, and feel impelled by the ever-growing body of sophisticated scholarship to address directly the "underside" of Judaism. In my *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*,³ I used the phrase "deconstructive hermeneutics," which was based on Paul Ricoeur's phrase "hermeneutics of suspicion," to name the wide array of social-scientific, feminist, literary-critical and cultural-studies methodologies that contemporary Jewish scholars are able to bring to bear on the study of Jewish texts and culture. These methodologies offer a far more complex set of academic tools than those available to the early twentieth century Jewish scholars. Readers of the *Journal of Textual Reasoning* can expect to see these contemporary methodologies continually present in our discussions. In addition, the postmodern ethical vision requires that Jewish philosophy widen its horizon to deal not only with traditional Jewish concerns about poverty and hunger, but mass murder and genocide, issues of women and gender, the State of Israel and its relations to its neighbors, and encountering the host of ethical issues that fall under Levinas's category of the ethical demands of "the other."

Openly employing the hermeneutics of suspicion and encountering the most important ethical issues of the Jewish and wider world, has been,

³ Steven Kepnes, "Postmodern Interpretations of Judaism: Deconstructive and Constructive approaches," in Steven Kepnes, ed., *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 1-20.

and will continue to be, central to the activity of what we will do in the Journal of Textual Reasoning. But what has always made TR unique, is that we have tried to ask a series of questions beyond those of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Is the meaning of a Jewish religious text exhausted by the hermeneutics of suspicion? What remains of the text after it has been passed under the knife of scholarly suspicion and criticism? Can the text still have relevance for a community of interpreters today?

In the meeting at which the Society for Textual Reasoning was founded, Elliot Wolfson suggested that Jewish religious texts retain a “surplus of meaning” that eludes even the most sophisticated of critical methodologies. On the basis of this surplus of meaning, textual reasoners have tried to retrieve another level of meaning for texts which is relevant to contemporary communities. Ricoeur referred to this type of approach as the “hermeneutics of retrieval.” Many others have called this the “post-critical” moment in the interpretation of a text. David Novak, in his essay in this volume, recalls another term of Ricoeur’s: the second naïveté. In the moment of second naïveté, we allow ourselves to consider the wisdom, the insight into the human condition, and the truth or “*aletheia*” (Novak, 7) that a text is capable of disclosing. We allow ourselves to be addressed by what I have called “The Text as Thou,”⁴ and to consider that address as a word from the “Eternal Thou,” from God. In this way, Textual Reasoning includes, as part of its agenda, an explicitly theological moment. In my book, *The Text as Thou*, I used the textual philosophy of Martin Buber and the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer to describe the attitude and conditions of the hermeneutics of retrieval. But where Gadamer’s, and even Buber’s works, suggest a rather staid dialogue between readers and a text, we, in the TR community, quickly adapted the more communal and open model of the talmudic dialogue. This has meant that we have attempted to enact dialogical readings of texts with multiple participants with a variety of textual and philosophical and theological

⁴ Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber’s Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

interests. And we have tried to spread the dialogues out over extended periods of time. Through these dynamic public dialogues, startling and surprising insights into texts, into the present moment, into our own individual and collective work, have emerged. The performative and dialogic nature of TR has meant that, though the participants are all dedicated scholars in their respective fields, we do not see Textual Reasoning as a society for the study of the Science of Judaism or the history of ideas. We will not eschew these subjects; and some of our issues will concentrate on the work of figures such as Cohen or Rosenzweig, whom we regard as important antecedents or resources for our work. But in the main, Textual Reasoning is about using the texts of the past and the sophisticated academic resources of the present, to actually do Jewish thinking, and Jewish theology, and Jewish ethics today.

Another important theoretical resource for us has been the cultural-linguistic theory of religion of the post-liberal Protestant theologian George Lindbeck.⁵ Lindbeck moves theories of religion away from concentrating on the religious experience of the subject or even the subject-other relationship toward the larger social and semiotic system that defines a religion. Combining both the insights of Ludwig Wittgenstein's analysis of language as a game and Clifford Geertz's theory of culture, Lindbeck sees religion as a "cultural-linguistic" system. This model counteracts the idealist method of picking and choosing certain "essential" texts, concepts, and principles by focusing on the semiotic system of Torah as a whole. Lindbeck offers us an "intertextual" method of determining the meaning of a word or concept. Just as we define words in a language by other words in the language, so we define words like "God" or "messiah" in the linguistic terms of Torah. Lindbeck's notion of religion as a language suggests that there is a "vocabulary" of relatively fixed elements: narratives, terms, concepts and then a grammar or series of "rules" which determines how the fixed elements are employed in changing situations. Applied to Judaism we can see the Torah as the fixed elements and

⁵ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984).

halakah as the rules which determine the Torah's application to life. The advantage of Lindbeck's schema is that it helps to establish the basic terms and rules of engagement within which Jewish thought and practice has traditionally been played out. In a period of identity diffusion and diminished popular Jewish education, Lindbeck's theory is helpful to establish the basic parameters of Jewish thought.

In addition, Geertz's emphasis on institutions, laws, culture, and rituals helps to ground Jewish thought in the material and social realities of Jewish life. The category of ritual or liturgy as a performative activity which brings together thought, sign, and action, is particularly suggestive for attempts in Textual Reasoning to place the dynamics of theory and practice, thought and action, into play. Lindbeck's model for religion as a cultural-linguistic system (rather than "private experiences" or concepts and ideas alone) also offers opportunities for deeper comparisons between different religious traditions as collective systems of meaning and ways of life. This has motivated not only a series of comparative TR discussions among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but has also led to the establishment of a separate Society for Scriptural Reasoning.

However, without referring to Lindbeck specifically, the essays of Peter Ochs and Aryeh Cohen in this volume, point to some of the limitations in the cultural-linguistic model. The Wittgensteinian model of religion as a language-game provides a "synchronic" view of religion as a relatively stable system. In the terms of Ochs's Peircean semiotics, the intertextual method establishes the meaning of a term with the dyadic relationship of the sign to its referent without adequately thematizing the relationship to the communal use of the term. The notion of "communal use" provides a greater theoretical role for the "diachronic" or changing historical element in our understanding of religions. Lindbeck's does refer to the effect that "changing circumstances" (82) can have on the meaning of a religious term or doctrine. But he admits that his approach "shifts the emphasis" to the ways in which "changing world views may be reinterpreted by one and the same [unchanging] religion" (82)

In turning to Peirce for his semiotic model, Ochs is able to offer a triadic model, sign-referent- interpretant (meaning in communal use) for

our understanding of how texts gain their meaning. The semiotic element of the “interpretant” adds the practical communal element and the dimensions of time and place to the semantic equation itself. I like to think of Lindbeck’s model as focusing more on the rules and equipment of a game with less regard to the players and the venue where the game is played. Certainly, playing the cultural-linguistic game of Judaism in America or Europe or Israel with university-trained academics offers different dynamics and different results than playing the same game in 7th century Babylonia. Lindbeck’s Wittgensteinian model for religious systems downplays the extent to which rules and meanings are constantly being negotiated and altered to meet the needs of not only a particular situation but different communities within each situation.

Aryeh Cohen’s essay suggests still another limitation of the cultural-linguistic model, and that is its tendency to confine meaning, truth, and ethics to a particular cultural-linguistic system. Cohen begins by sensitizing us to the extent to which the talmudic logic is confined to the “four cubits of Talmud,” i.e. to its own indigenous forms of legal reasoning. This limitation can exclude not only all forms external legal reasoning, but can be so strictly applied that even non-rabbinic prophetic authorities (or even the voice of God, cf. b. Baba Metsia 59b) are regarded as inconsequential to talmudic reasoning. This can lead to a kind of myopic insularity that closes Torah off not only to outside forms of knowledge but to Jews—the poor, women, the uneducated—who lack the resources and status to play the game of Talmud. And with regard to those non-Jews who live outside of the Jewish world, the Talmud can be dismissive, or worse, discriminatory.

To remedy this situation, Cohen looks to an interesting “liminal” intertextual source, the figure of Elijah, a biblical source, and two “extratextual” sources. Even though Elijah is neither a tannaitic rabbi from the period of the Mishnah nor an amoraic rabbi from the period of the Gemara, and even though his legal pronouncements are made without recourse to standard Talmudic hermeneutical rules, his statements are taken, as Cohen tells us, “on par with the Mishnah” (3). Cohen lists the many examples in which Elijah appears in the Talmud and categorizes

him alternatively as a “mediator between heaven and earth,” a “moral arbiter,” and a “signpost that points to a higher order of morality” (4-5). Cohen’s biblical source to force the Talmud outside itself is from Exodus 22:21: “And a stranger you shall not wrong — for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” Much like Hermann Cohen, Aryeh uses the notion of love for the stranger as a source to open Jewish intertextual reasoning up to concern for non-Jews.⁶

One of Aryeh Cohen’s extratextual warrants comes from the theoretical work of Robert Cover. In his famous essay, “Nomos and Narrative,” Cover suggests that all law sits in a broader narrative context which describes a moral world in which humans can live. Cohen’s other extratextual warrant comes from the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas and his notion of the “face of the other.” All of these texts are then brought together to reason that Jews must not build “gate houses” which block them into “ghettoes” of their own making and which close them off from the cry of the sufferer. At the end of his essay, Cohen summarizes the purposes of Textual Reasoning as “thinking through texts to the claims of the world outside the *bet midrash* [house of study].”

Cohen offers us an appealing model for the textual reasoner in the figure of Elijah. From the outset, I must say that we regard ourselves as neither prophets nor intercessors to heaven, and we do not presume to possess any superior moral authority. Yet textual reasoners do cherish Elijah’s position as a “liminal figure,” a figure who plays the cultural-linguistic game of Torah at the margins and borders, just at the edge of the law, *lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*. We admire Elijah as a liminal figure who moves between and mediates between the Bible and the Talmud, between the house of study and the outside world. And we admire Elijah as a figure who tries to bring some hope and healing for real human suffering.

⁶ It is instructive to contrast Aryeh Cohen’s method of textual reasoning, with its honest and open criticism of the Talmudic textual tradition, to Hermann Cohen’s method of idealization. Yet the fact that they both openly place philosophy in relation to the textual “sources of Judaism” and the fact that they share a goal of opening Judaism up to the stranger, also shows how Textual Reasoning follows in the tradition of the philosophy of ethical monotheism.

The liminal position of the textual reasoner, the value of standing between and mediating, emerges strongly in the essays of both Robert Gibbs and Peter Ochs. Gibbs views Jewish texts, themselves, as vehicles to mediate relations between different readers who reveal their unique othernesses through their different readings of the same text. The talmudic text, Kiddushin 40b, that Gibbs chooses to focus on, begins with a dichotomy between study and practice, and works toward a mediated solution which attempts to preserve the value of both.

Peter Ochs has argued consistently for the need to provide Jewish and modern philosophy with a way out of its tendencies to construct dichotomies: subjectivity/objectivity, theory/practice, individual/community, male/female, modernity/tradition, fundamentalist/secularist, Jew/gentile. These dichotomies, he suggests, come from the particular dyadic logic of modern philosophy that has antecedents in Greek philosophy. To remedy this problem, Ochs offers us a theory of mediation in the triadic semiotics Peirce. Ochs's essay in this volume discusses the ways in which textual scholarship has been forced into a dichotomy between academic methods which supposedly establish the text's "objective sense" and traditional interpretations which establish a "merely subjective" reading. He laments that "there are no academically articulable rules that mediate the relationship between subjective and objective sense and referents. There is therefore no direct academic guidance of communal interpretation, nor is academic study put in any way acknowledged way to the service of the community's concerns" (42). Ochs's creative interpretations of the terms *derash* (interpretive meaning) and *peshat* (literal meaning) and his use of Peircean semiotics is meant precisely to provide the mediation between "subjective" and "objective" readings so that TR can serve the practical needs of Jewish and wider communities.

But Ochs is also very clear and helpful in delineating the proper role and status of TR in relation to Jewish communities and real-life problems. In the mode of Elijah, we are not on the "front lines." We are not pulpit rabbis, or Jewish Federation or social workers. Some of us may have rabbinical or social work degrees, of course, but when we practice TR, we

do so in the role of academics. This means, as Ochs suggests, that our proper place is “to fill the pragmatic function of serving as profession of professions: that is, second order professions called into work when these ‘everyday’ professions fail to repair certain problems” (37). Textual reasoners help to repair problems through the imaginative process of setting forth hypothetical and possible solutions. They also can help by clarifying, organizing, and displaying the logic and rules of the solutions that everyday professionals are working through. And textual reasoners are not disembodied uninvolved analysts; they live in communities, often experiencing the problems firsthand. Thus, they bring these experiences to their analytical work as resources for healing.

Ochs’s essay furthers the development of TR by providing us with a pragmatic notion of truth as healing, or *tikkun*, for the “problems that have arisen in our everyday communities” (37). The interpretations of texts and “principles of action” which TR develops are “true — if they prove to be reliable guides to this *tikkun* ; otherwise they are false” (37). This pragmatic criterion provides a complement to my Buberian notion of truth as the moment of disclosure of the “text as Thou” or Novak’s notion of truth as “*aletheia*” (7). In his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James gave us with a way of ordering these different notions of truth when he offered us three complementary criteria for religious truth: “immediate luminosity [*aletheia*], philosophical reasonableness [semiotic rules], and moral helpfulness [*tikkun*].”⁷

I have here given a quick overview of the antecedents and contemporary expressions of the theory of textual reasoning. However, the real power of TR is seen in its actual practice. This is displayed beautifully in Ochs’s review and analysis of our extended chat-line discussion on the issue of the use of the *mechitsa*, the “divider” that traditionally separates men and women in the synagogue. Here, it is obvious that TR is not a matter of one scholar “applying” a method to arrive at the meaning of a text. Ochs shows TR to be a dynamic activity in which a variety of approaches to texts and issues emerge organically to

⁷ William James, *Varieties*, 18.

address concrete human concerns. In the TR dialogues, we can hear the wonderful cacophony of voices brought to bear on an issue of great importance not only to TR members but also to the wider Jewish community. The discussion reveals that the discourse of TR is truly a mixture of philosophy, text criticism, and personal experience that takes place in a communal activity which is akin to a ritual practice. The rabbis call communal group study *Talmud Torah*. And although TR is too irreverent and too open to non-Jewish texts and methods to fit into the category of *Talmud Torah*, it does share some of the spontaneous, dialogic and liturgical energy of the study of Torah. And the ritual aspect of TR helps to describe the way in which TR, in practice, overcomes the dichotomies of which we have spoken. TR, as ritual, integrates different methodological approaches to texts and discloses new possibilities and insights that were not available to individual textual reasoners before the dialogues started.

At a first level, Ochs is pleased to describe textual reasoners engaged in a dialogue about their differences on a real practical issue that crystallizes both modern and traditional attitudes on gender. Ochs shows TR to be involved in the clarification of what Max Kadushin called “value-concepts,” categories which “integrate reason, communal tradition, and personal feelings” (28). However, Ochs does not remain at the level of mere description. Coming over a decade after many TR dialogues of this sort, Ochs’s essay is meant to prod textual reasoners to reflect more analytically and systematically on how it is that we function. Ochs models for us another level of deliberation on the work of TR that would track the patterns of our discussions and could produce “rules” for our work. These rules are not meant to be rigid determinants of our future activities, but are meant to be vague and general descriptions for how we acted in one particular extended discussion. Like the Peircean meaning of signs themselves, these rules are continually open for renegotiation in accordance with their use in a particular time and place. Yet Ochs aims to encourage us to articulate rules to move the Society of Textual Reasoning further toward realizing its goals of mediating between the dichotomies of subjectivity and objectivity, of tradition and modernity, of

fundamentalism and rational foundationalism, so that we can be agents of practical tikkun.

In the final and most ambitious section of his paper, Ochs suggests ways in which the rules of Textual Reasoning can be further refined by offering us four domains (36) for TR work. In the course of this discussion Ochs offers us alternative understandings of the traditional notions of *peshat* (literal meaning) and *derash* (interpretive meaning). Building from his triadic semiotic and the recent work of David Weiss Halivni, Ochs argues that what we usually do when we understand a text in communal settings falls under the category of *derash*, or “meaning in use.” The category of *peshat* comes into play when normal “received senses” of a text no longer work to guide a community’s behavior. At this point “*peshat*” readings, which are abstracted from the communal setting (and therefore follow a “two-part” sign-referent semiotic), can be used to disclose, not one “literal meaning,” but a series of “possible semantic meanings that could be read off of a text for a given community’s meaning in use” (43). Ochs understands *peshat* readings to be the “specialized” skill of academic approaches to texts. He assigns these approaches the role of “temporally bracketing local meanings-in-use in order to disclose ways of liberating communities from specific, ineffective rules of interpretation” (43). Thus, Ochs gives academic scholarship a clearly reparative, indeed, redemptive role. This understanding of academic scholarship offers an alternative to Ricoeur’s categorization of these methods as tools of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” and places them in the service of the “hermeneutics of retrieval” and the “post-critical” moment.

As the reader will see, although Ochs produces 16 “rules of textual reasoning,” he does not provide a solution to the issue of the *mechitsa*. This is both because the TR community did not pursue the issue as far as it might have and because TR functions best as a society creative motivators and imaginers of solutions and as a society of mediators between philosophy and Torah, between the academy and the living communities and institutions. Certainly, we can go much further than we have gone thus far and the founding of this journal is aimed at pushing our work forward. But as we take the rather dramatic step of launching the Journal

of Textual Reasoning, we do so cognizant both of the extent of our hopes to contribute to *tikkun olam* and our very human limitations as artisans of thought, texts and words.