

Scriptural Reasoning: From Text Study to Inquiry

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When we think about Scriptural Reasoning, what comes to mind is an exercise whereby religious persons from different communities engage in text study such that friendships are formed, judgments overcome, and new insights regarding one's own and others' texts are generated. Without denying SR's value for deepening bonds between persons from different religious traditions, the purpose of my discussion today is to begin with the account of SR as structured inter-faith text study and observe a line from this analysis of textual word out to an analysis of SR's contribution to academic knowledge production or inquiry. More specifically, the following set of reflections upon Scriptural Reasoning will focus upon what I take to be its invitation to reorient thinking out of claim-making or propositionalism towards an exposure of the procedures which constitute claims. Scriptural reasoning advances a turn towards reasoning as a procedural activity and encourages a turn to reflection on method in academic work, which I argue militates against tendencies towards disciplinary isolation. Central to this analysis of Scriptural Reasoning is a distinction between what I refer to as apologetic SR and reflective SR, the former a mode of SR frequently deployed for deepening inter-religious bonds and the latter offering an occasion for reconsidering the primacy of method in academic inquiry.

Apologetic SR

To draw out the first profile of Scriptural Reasoning as apologetics, I will make use of the collection of Scriptural Reasoning occasions presented in Mike Higton and Rachel Muers' *The Text in Play*. In chapter eight, Higton and Muers offer an imagined description of how a text, Psalm 1 from the Hebrew Scriptures, might be read in an SR study session with Jews and Christians.

In their account of a type of Scriptural Reasoning conversation that such text might prompt, the authors organize the responses of the participants by 'house.' Christian readers will, they suggest, offer 'Christological' readings, and Jewish readers Toraitic readings. Higton and Muers offer their account of a Christian scriptural reasoner reading Psalm 1 after reviewing what they take to be the egregious interpretation offered by Martin Luther. Luther reads Psalm 1 through a Christological lens whereby the righteous are identified with those who testify to Christ and the wicked with those who "like chaff which the wind drives away" are the Jews. Is there another option, the authors ask? Central to Muers and Higton's concern is the exclusive claim to ownership over the meaning of the psalm implied by Luther's reading. If the wicked are the Jews and the righteous are Christians, then Jews would not, it would seem, be welcome as reading partners in studying this text. Scriptural Reasoning, they maintain, offers just that occasion. But how might the conversation look if Jews and Christians engaged in a study of Psalm 1 together?

A Christian sitting at the table, the authors say, will first and inevitably ask, “What happens if we take Psalm 1 to be about Jesus?”¹ Let me organize one of the responses into the following three claims: 1) Jesus is the paradigm of righteousness, and his righteousness is the way of the cross; 2) the wicked are those who appear to ‘stand,’ ‘sit,’ ‘walk’ on their own and by virtue of their own resources; 3) therefore, the righteous are those who do not rely on their own resources but follow the way of Christ. Taking matters further, Higton and Muers suggest that these readers may supplement the above interpretation by acknowledging an overlap between this interpretation and a message frequently announced in other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures. Prompted by the presence of Jews at the table, the Christian reference to other parts of the Hebrew Scriptures shows that, contra Luther, “the Christological reading of the psalm need not necessarily remove the text from its existing company, but has the potential to send us deeper into the meanings that that this psalm already possesses in its context within the Hebrew canon.”² Indeed, Muers and Higton say, this Jewish presence enables Christians to make an even deeper hermeneutical move identifying the value of the law within a Christological perspective:

Once we have got that far, we can’t really avoid asking whether Jesus’ righteousness, the way of the cross, can (contra Hilary of Poitiers) be understood as “delight...in the law of will pass from the law until it is all accomplished (Matt 5:18) and that no one whose righteousness does not exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees can enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 5:20)”³

At this point, Muers and Higton imagine, the Jewish voices at the table will chime in, stimulated by the turn to the focus on the law, and say something to the effect of, “Indeed, the righteous delight in the law and the wicked in their own ways.” But they will also go on to note that missing in the Christian interpretation is a focus on the “obedience to God’s law in the context of the people of Israel. It opposes to the false stability of the wicked a different kind of continuity and stability: the continuity and stability of *people and observance*.”⁴ Carrying this interpretation further, Muers and Higton indicate that the Jewish reader may even suggest that the criterion for righteousness and wickedness derives less from the degree of material prosperity and more from the level of or commitment to holiness in the land and with the law. And with this, the Jew might confront the Christian and ask (implicitly or explicitly) whether their Christological reading has operated as a supersession of the covenant life of law, land, and temple.

Our authors suggest that the Christian might respond to this “by arguing that the psalm is precisely part of a trajectory in the Hebrew Bible whereby land and temple are relativized...in favor of delight in and obedience to the Torah....[T]he *Sitz im Leben* of *Torah* has become ‘more and more the heart of man.’”⁵ In one last turn, Muers and Higton note that to this our Jewish

¹ Mike Higton and Rachel Muers, *The Text in Play: Experiments in Reading Scripture* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 84.

² *Ibid.*, 85.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.

reader will respond in skepticism and point out the supersessionist character of the above reading. And so, Muers and Higton conclude, “the argument might go on.”⁶

Let us now look at the logic of the conversation. Recall that the authors began their reconstruction by juxtaposing their Scriptural Reasoning account with a review of Luther’s reading of Psalm 1, whose discriminatory interpretation leaves little window for a Jewish conversation partner to feel welcome. Still, upon closer examination, there is no difference between the logic of Luther’s interpretation and that of the authors’ imagined Christian scriptural reasoner. Each interpretation has a positive and a negative formulation:

Positive:	
<i>Luther:</i>	<i>Christian Scriptural Reasoner:</i>
Jesus is righteousness only through grace.	Jesus is righteousness only through the cross.
These people witness to grace	These people follow the way of the cross.
These people are righteous.	These people are righteous.

Negative:	
<i>Luther:</i>	<i>Christian Scriptural Reasoner:</i>
Jesus is righteousness only through grace.	Jesus is righteousness only through the cross.
These people follow the law.	These people follow their own way.
These people are not righteous-wicked.	These people are not righteous or wicked.

Muers and Higton are correct to say that Luther’s interpretation would not lend itself to a conversation with Jewish readers. I also recognize that Christian scriptural reasoners who are hospitable to hosting Jews or being hosted by Jews will avail themselves of a different opportunity for a) deepening their relationship with Jews and b) deepening their understanding of their own scriptural and religious tradition. However, before entertaining why or how either of these two occasions of Christian deepening may arise from such a conversation, I want to examine and play out the logical moves that follow from the Christian scriptural reasoner’s initial interpretation.

To do so is to appreciate first and foremost that, like Luther, the Christian scriptural reasoner’s interpretation operates as a deduction. To be clear, a deductive argument is one in which there is a necessary relationship between the premise and the conclusion. Such assumed premises can be either definitions, logical entailments, structures, or mathematical necessities. In the instances I will deal with, the premises will be definitional. In his essay, “Making Deep Reasonings Public,” Nick Adams refers to the participant’s appeal to the axiomatic principles of her life world. As we can see in our example, axiomatic principles or assumed definitions

⁶ Ibid.

organize or determine new or additional information. Specifically, the major premise operates as the ‘rule’ or law of the pattern, the subsequent claim functions as the case at hand—that which is subject to analysis or reasoned review in relation to the premise—and the third claim presents the conclusion reached by virtue of the subsumption of the case under the rule. Implicit in the interpretation is an order of reasoning rooted in an axiom, with subsequent claims depending upon this definitional foundation.

The above logic of deduction functions as what I will refer to as “the logic of apologetics,” when by apologetics I mean a defense of one’s faith to a non-believer. Within a Scriptural Reasoning context, a deductive (axiomatically-based) argument operates defensively insofar as it asserts not only the rationality but the truth of the interpretation put forward, since the rationality of a deductive argument is predicated upon the *truth or certainty* of its premise. In Highton and Muer’s account, the Christian offers an explicitly Christological interpretation, and whatever reading rests on such a premise reflects and supports that assumption and is held to be true from the vantage point of the presenter.

Still, it is reasonable to ask, if the scriptural reasoner’s argument operates as a defense of the faith, how can it offer an occasion for inter-religious understanding? Luther’s interpretation provides little such opportunity, and yet the logic deployed there is the same as the logic deployed by our scriptural reasoner. We might say that an understanding between the Christian and the Jew can transpire when participants discover shared content in the particular links of a chain of reasoning, even when the foundations of those chains (the deductive and lawful premises) are different or even irreconcilable. We saw a fine example of this when the Christian participant’s juxtaposition of the righteousness of those who obey God with the wickedness of those who prosper and follow their own way inspired the Jewish participants to chime in with a hearty “yes.” The more of these occasions discovered, of course, the more communication between the two and the greater the relationship, appreciation, and peace-making opportunities. Moreover, these types of occasions precipitate a deepening not only of the inter-faith relationship, but of a tradition’s own self-understanding, and with this increased opportunities for recognizing points of overlap between traditions. In this particular situation, the authors tell us, the presence of the Jews and their shared acknowledgment of the character of wickedness prompted Christian participants to dig further into their own tradition to explore Jesus’ appreciation for or “delight in the law,” thereby jump-starting a new conversation between the two traditions around this shared delight. One point of similarity motored recognition of another, increasing the possibilities for new channels of communication.

Alternatively, apologetic or deductive SR can generate an understanding rooted in participants’ appreciation for the formal rationality of the other. Even troubling interpretations can be appreciated for their logical symmetry. From this, a number of promising scenarios may arise. For example, recognizing what they take to be the tension between the rationality and yet potentially exclusionary impact of a given Christian interpretation, Jewish participants may find themselves returning to their own interpretations to question whether some similar phenomenon occurs there. The critique of this presentation could prompt a self-critique. Alternatively, Christians presenting such a pattern of reasoning may in turn recognize the need to, if not alter the actual content of their premises and results, then at the very least refine them—that is, more clearly express them. Third, it may be the case that Jews and Christians who recognize a shared

pattern of reasoning may admit significant differences over many particular points of argumentation but may enlist their appreciation of this shared structure of rationality to hear the other tradition out—that is, allow them to present their reasoning for position X, thereby opening a window of understanding if not agreement.

At this juncture, let me stand back and offer a few additional meta-comments on what we have observed. Apologetic SR can result in mutual understanding among readers. Still, it is important to remain sober regarding the limits of this hermeneutical option insofar as it operates as a logically binary dynamic of defense and critique, positively expressed as comparison and contrast and negatively expressed as productive or unproductive disagreement. A more careful examination of the structure of this type of Scriptural Reasoning exchange will account for these particular limits.

Apologetic thinking of the kind here observed rests upon what I will refer to as propositionalism. By propositionalism I mean the assertion of a claim or fixed announcement of the joining of a concept and attributes. In these instances, a concept is offered as a general term which includes particular attributes. The relationship between the concept and its attributes creates a basis for subsequent consideration of new information, depending upon the extent to which the new information can be subsumed under the relation between concept and attributes as given or not. Consequently, propositional axioms take for granted and present a rule for a judgment or what is the link between a subject and a predicate—i.e., the ‘is’ or the copula. Moreover, propositionalism presupposes that the subsumption of attributes under concepts directly refers to reality—i.e., it presupposes that the association between the concept and its attributes represents or refers to the actual association between these elements as they truly exist. As such, propositional assertions do not signal opportunities to question the relation between the subject and the predicate of an axiom. *They do not ask about the ‘is’ or the rule that determines the relation between the two.* Rather, the rule is assumed in the axiom and in all applications of the axiom as well.

Ironically, it becomes immediately clear that, to the extent to which propositionalism takes for granted its de facto mode of judgment-determination, it nullifies the very notion of rule-following altogether. Rule-following presupposes knowledge of a rule, but propositionalism behaves as if what indeed is a rule (a process of judgment-making) simply is truth-assertion. It is, however, the taken-for-granted status of the rule and its prepared answer to the question of what it is in instances of subsequent application of the rule which are responsible for the gap between the claim (and the claimant or knower) and the so-called reality (the object or known) to which it purportedly refers, so far as in cases of deductive logic, the rule determines the content. If in SR cases questions are raised concerning the meaning of a word or a verse—i.e., hermeneutical examples of the “what is it?” question, recourse is frequently made to axiomatic claims which offer pre-established rules for the relation between concepts and attributes, such that the word or verse at hand may be understood when subsumed under and/or in adherence to the established method of intelligibility reflected in the axiom. Indeed, deductive arguments rooted in axiomatic claims, and therefore regulated by the rule of the relation between concept and attribute established in the claim, may generate rational conclusions and thereby offer what appear to be conclusive answers to questions of hermeneutical determination. Rationality, however, is of course not the same as truth, and as is well-known, a deductive argument may yield a valid but

unsound conclusion if and when the premise is untrue. In fact, when deployed in apologetic contexts, deductive premises work to reinforce the separation between claims derived from them (issued by the ‘knower’) and the intelligibility of the subject-matter they claim to present (the ‘object’), so far as they presuppose the ‘rule’ of content determination. What is the apparently obvious and rational effort to get at the meaning of a verse, topic, or thing is, when more carefully, examined a regulative shield which over-determines content, digging ever deeper divides between what is knowable and what is claimed to be known.

As suggested above, apologetic SR produces two common results: 1) disagreement regarding either premises or applications of premises and/or 2) agreements consisting of shared orderings within shared premises. Concerning the latter, it is noteworthy to recognize how, as an exercise in axiomatic presentation, apologetic SR operates much like what are referred to as Linnaean classificatory or taxonomical forms of information analysis. Presupposing the adequacy of the genus-species (concept/attribute) relation as the rule or method of analyzing data, taxonomies claim to offer valid modes of comparing and contrasting data in the name of knowledge production. Clearly, application of deductive analyses has functioned as a common instrument in a range of academic disciplines, including but not limited to biology, zoology, anthropology and, of course, religious studies. While practitioners of Scriptural Reasoning might assume a significant divide between religious studies as practiced in the academy and Scriptural Reasoning, both exercise methodologically determined deductive analyses. If the study of religion takes for granted definitions of religion, which it then uses to schematize data from religions it studies, scriptural reasoners invoke premises or rules of intelligibility which they use to discern hermeneutical questions. Each gestures towards its subject matter with an expectation to *subject matter determination*, and while Scriptural Reasoning does not exercise the same self-conscious interest in developing classificatory analyses of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, it nonetheless produces such analyses when operating in its apologetic or deductive mode.

Unfortunately, both results have a negative consequence, namely the structuring of and/or place-holding for that which is deemed unknowable. Put in visual terms, deductive reasoning rooted in propositionalism constructs a fence around its own claims such that validity is correlated with imperviousness to exterior occasions of possible falsification. Such a posture renders disagreements more likely and illuminates disagreement as the state under which another’s rule or application of rule in a deductive scheme is deemed unintelligible. Disagreement of this sort is undoubtedly conversation-stopping, and while any particular SR study session may not come to a close because of such a disagreement, the line of inquiry around a particular word or verse will halt because of it, only to be reinvigorated by recourse to a taxonomic similarity.

But taxonomic analysis only apparently yields more positive results, since its reach is only as far as persons locate points of overlap between parallel deductive schemes. Identification of these points of overlap does little to resolve the question of the intelligibility of data unorganizable within existing conceptual rules. Appreciation of this problem has long been recognized by critical analyses of ‘religion’ rooted in definitions of religious traditions. Such definitions consequently determine and distinguish between what counts as ‘religion’ and what remains outside of it and unintelligible within the terms established by experts in the field. However, recognition of the limits of taxonomic approaches to the study of religion has not

amounted to recognition of the mechanism which generates this type of analysis. As argued here, there is a direct correlation between the degree of unknowability around an issue or object of inquiry and the fixity of a rule or procedure of subject determination—i.e., the stronger the presupposition of a rule or procedure of judgment-making, the greater the distance to the subject-matter and therefore decreased opportunity for knowledge of it. When the relation between concept and attribute is preconceived—that is, when the rule of judgment-making is already determined—knowledge means nothing more than a game of addition and organization of pre-determined content.

The alternative to such an approach is easy to see: if inquiry is paralyzed when propositionalism is taken for granted, inquiry is opened up when propositionalism is interrogated. Here data is approached devoid of a pre-established analysis of how it constitutes a judgment, and the question “what is it?” is replaced by the question “how do we think this?”—how is X data constitutive of a judgment; how is this thinkable? Inquiry into how we think is inextricably linked to inquiry into what we think. Reflection upon method and content are bound to each other. Therefore, reflection upon method alone (as done by theorists in religious studies) is not sufficient if method remains external to subject-matter.

What this alternative looks like requires a lot of unpacking. Fortunately for us, it is no mere abstract consideration but a possibility, the occasion for which arises in Scriptural Reasoning. Scriptural Reasoning is not only apologetic but also reflective, and it is to this form that I will now turn.

Reflective SR

In chapter nine, Higton and Muers document another Scriptural Reasoning session, this time focused on a Qur’anic text (40:78). The SR discussion here exposes two different Scriptural Reasoning options: apologetics and reflection. The difference between the two can be identified immediately by the grammatical forms deployed by participants. Familiar with the verse, the original language, and its textual context and religiously committed to its meaning, the apologists, at least early in the discussion, speak *assertorically*, affirming and denying the *questions* posed by non-Muslim participants. The question-answer character of the conversation begins first with non-Muslims asking about the specific translation of a word and a Muslim apologist (Muers and Higton use the term “host”) presenting a detailed answer. Soon, however, questions about translation morph into questions about meaning or definition, yet the hosts continue to speak assertorically with the non-hosts generating questions. One participant, for example asks, “Who are the vain-doers?”⁷ Later another inquires, “What makes someone a messenger?”⁸ Both questions are important because they demonstrate the extent to which neither of these two participants understands what it means to speak of a messenger or a vain-doer even after a closer translation of the verse has been provided. Neither has a rule for what the Qur’an means by messengers or vain-doers; the words are indeterminate for them. By contrast, the Muslim participants do have a rule for determining who counts as a messenger. In this particular

⁷ Ibid., 96.

⁸ Ibid.

conversation, they offer pieces of this rule over the course of the discussion rather than assert it all at once. Still, here are examples of these assertoric or axiomatic pieces:

-“The Qur’an names twenty-seven messengers—but there are supposed to be 124,000 messengers in total.”

-“Don’t think these are the only ones! There are many more. There’s an abundance. More than you can count”—because 124,000 is not really fixing a clear limit, it is “thousands upon thousands.” “I have sent you more messengers. Be open to them. Wherever you turn, there will be a messenger.”

- “It is signs that confirm that a messenger is a messenger.”⁹

In each case, a Muslim participant pulls from a pool of established characteristics of messengers, i.e., the elements of their rule-based understanding of this concept (e.g., messengers are abundant, messengers are sent, they are confirmed by a sign). Equally important is the rhetorical posture of the Muslim participant adding a performative element to the articulation of this ‘rule’ of use. He/she answers, presents, asserts.

If the conversation were to continue along the lines of the apologetic model described above, we would expect the non-Muslims to jump in with analogues of rules of usage around either a concept of messenger or prophecy from their own traditions, beginning an exposure of the chain of reasoning characteristic of a Christian or Jewish understanding of this concept, or one which in their estimation is similar to it. And indeed, at one point in the discussion after the conversation has introduced a connection between a messenger and the ‘signs’ to which the messenger is responsible, a participant makes this type of move:

I don’t think the right comparison is with Jesus’ message and miracles, because the real sign in the Christian context is Jesus himself. ...I don’t think, in Jesus’ case, you could so easily say, “It was not for a Messenger to bring a sign.”¹⁰

Here the non-Muslim provides a Christian account of the meaning of message and messenger, invoking a Christian rule that Jesus is “the real sign in the Christian context.” Indeed, upon hearing this last comment, the convener suggests that the group “move on to a Christian text now...[since the] conversation seems to be heading that way?”¹¹ Nonetheless, this comment is followed by a request by another non-Muslim to “spend a bit more time with this text,”¹² suggesting alternatively, that the invocation of Jesus as the real ‘sign’ did not function as the conversation-stopper that some participants thought. However, the reason why, in this instance, is not because the participant sought to advance a link in the deductive chain but recognized that

⁹ Ibid., 97.

¹⁰ Ibid., 104.

¹¹ Ibid., 105.

¹² Ibid.

invocation of the claim of Jesus as the real sign was, in this context, part of a larger effort to render intelligibility to the Qur'anically presented notion of 'messenger.'

At this point in the conversation a different pattern between Muslims and non-Muslims has already emerged. The first signs of this difference appear when, in response to Muslim answers, non-Muslim participants press on with a persistent sequence of questions obstructing the apologetic pattern of defense, challenge, announcement of similarity, and announcement of difference. As noted, these questions begin as simple inquiries prompting Muslims to issue assertoric responses. Soon, however, the questions take on a modal or 'could it be' character. In one instance, a Muslim reader offers the following axiom re: messengers: "The messenger is one who is given a sign, who believes the sign and proclaims it or presents it."¹³ In response, one of the non-Muslim participants neither accepts nor offers a Christian (or Jewish) account of such a notion but instead states, "I'm interested in the phenomenology of all of this: the signs have attention-grabbing power," a suggestion which the Muslim respondent immediately rejects, saying, "But it's not just attention grabbing. The Qur'an speaks against signs simply as spectacle—things that attract attention to themselves, rather than to God."¹⁴ The non-Muslim in effect takes this claim as a qualification of his notion—only, however, to carry on further with this his inquiry "regarding the phenomenology of all of this":

So there's this attention-grabbing power, and yet...specific signs—they have a kind of contagious transparency: your eye is drawn towards them and then beyond them, and if these signs do their work, then other things around them...begin to become transparent too.¹⁵

The non-Muslim presents a hypothetical statement. More specifically, he inquires as to whether the intelligibility of the notion of signs (and by extension the messenger) might be illuminated in relation to a kind of epidemiological discourse. With such a move, the reader has taken the notion of 'sign' and placed it into a different semantically-charged environment in order to attempt to garner a clearer sense of its meaning or intelligibility. The reader's invocation of this environment is not deductive—that is, the incorporation of the notion of 'sign' into the discourse of contagion is not linked to a standard of validity which determines the meaning of 'sign' within this context. On the contrary, the modal character of the response signifies the absence of a definitive rule, only the raising of the possibility of such an explanation as an account of what 'sign' might mean. Neither is the hypothesis inductive, as the claim that a sign is like a virus is not substantiated by a statistical probability derived from observed examples whereby signs indeed have been recognized as like cells. That is, the hypothesis is motored by a metaphor and invokes a non-observable possibility/explanation. Here, the notion of 'sign' is placed in relation to a web of particulars constitutive of a discourse of contagion, and a possible explanation of the meaning of 'sign' in this context is proffered by the reader—i.e., that perhaps signs are like viruses.

¹³ Ibid., 99.

¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The conversation continues with non-Muslims hypothesizing about other environments of meaning which may be helpful in illuminating the meaning of the terms in question. Given the emphasis upon the explanatory power of the hypothesis, we might describe these reflective moves as abductive in character. It is worth noting that hypotheses of this type are described as ampliative in the sense that they speculatively posit explanations that are not already observed or provided but arise out of new contexts or newly identified points of relations between terms/notions, ideas, experiences. But what, we might ask, makes a participant invoke one environment or network of idea-relations rather than another? Generally speaking, participants invoke environments which are ‘live’ for them and will have value to the conversation so far as they are ‘live’ for others. And, at the very least, networks of relations are ‘live’ to readers when they are relations within which they themselves operate or are familiar. These environments or habitats may be natural, or disciplinary, or even cultural, and they describe the myriad of networks within which we as persons inevitably dwell. However, environments ought to be distinguished from world-views, which are ideational constructs that explain and lend determination to these relations.

Consequently, conversations motored by reflective reasoning begin and end differently from apologetic ones. Apologetic discussions can come to an end as a result of disagreement or incommensurability. Reflective SR begins at this point of apparent incommensurability and jumpstarts a quest for the intelligibility of a claim or verse or idea, as the idea is situated by a range of environments within which it may become knowable. Motored by indeterminacy and not shared assumptions, the lifespan of a reflective SR conversation has less to do with discovery of points of commonality among users of a given notion and more to do with the reach of participants’ imagination and experience—both of which contribute to the generation of hypotheses..

Epistemological/Philosophical Implications of Reflective SR

There are a number of critical epistemological implications of reflective SR worthy of note:

1. In reflective SR, the intelligibility of a verse derives neither from subsumption under a concept, since it is this subsumption which is questioned, nor by consideration of the word or verse in isolation, since indeed it is its intelligibility which constitutes the object of inquiry.
2. Consequently, the meaning of the verse or word, emerges only by way of reflection upon the verse or term in its relations or environment.
3. The choice of which environments may be enlisted to ‘determine’ the relations within which such a verse or word may have meaning are a product of the interpretive situation of the scriptural reasoners—e.g., reflection determines the significance of words or ideas (things) not only in relation to external environments, but also as these external environments are invoked by the persons reflecting. Meaning is a product of the speculative *engagement* of the thinker and the intelligibility of the verse.

So understood, a thing's intelligibility is never static but always changing. As well, one thing (verse, word, object) will generate endless expressions of intelligibility.

But what can we say about this newly identified so-called intelligibility? It is one thing to recognize that we may derive intelligibility out of the particular relations within which the verse, phrase, or object about which we inquire into is embedded. *It is another thing to consider what takes place in the process of hypothesis-generation which follows from this recognition.* Frequently we hear from folks reflecting upon SR that it modalizes claims—i.e., a claim taken by a believer to be assertorically true is discussed by the group as merely possible. Such a description, however, is not exhaustive. In the above reflective SR discussion, claims are not merely modally altered but entirely bracketed given the lack of shared cognizance around propositional premises. It does not help someone who does not understand a claim at all to have it registered as a possibility, since what the listener does not understand is the assumed link and subsumption of the attributes under a concept. Rather, the listener interrogates the very assumption of this link, and it is this moment which instigates what I mean by reflective Scriptural Reasoning.

Note that I don't mean to suggest that modalization of claims never takes place in Scriptural Reasoning. What I do mean to say is that it remains a feature of apologetic SR and is not exhaustive of the kind of hypothesis-generation characterized by the speculation upon environments and relations within which verses or terms register as potentially determinate. If, in other words, reflective Scriptural Reasoning arises out of moments of propositional indeterminacy, it functions as a challenge to the very conception of a proposition as an adequate representation of knowledge, since by virtue of the over-determination of an attribute by a concept, a fence is drawn around claims divorcing them inevitably from the important input (and potential falsification) of experience. Instead, hypothesis-generation in reflective SR means consideration of both the fact **that** determination of the meaning of a word or verse (or thing) emerges out of specific relations to other words, verses, or things together with consideration of **how** these relations are construed. Indeed, it is analogous to a kind of transcendental logic in the Kantian sense. What do I mean by this?

Kant's transcendental logic constitutes a novum in the history of philosophy, and one which has tremendous bearing on how we might recognize the value of Scriptural Reasoning for inquiry. To speak in basic terms, if, according to Kant, general logic is the study of the correct principles or rules of reason (i.e., how reason operates) without relation to either specific objects or even objects at all, then transcendental logic is the study of the rules or principles of reason at work when we think about or have knowledge of objects. There are, according to Kant, universal rules that apply to any and all determinations of objective knowledge—i.e., there is a universal set of conditions for all objective knowledge. The science of transcendental logic is an investigation into the rules or principles with which objective judgments are made. Judgments regarding objects reflect 'synthetic' activities exercised by the understanding. Such synthetic activities which, qua routinized, are rulings or universally exercised methods or procedures of judgment-formation. While Kant's identification of the categories or principles of understanding as the universal conditions for all objective knowledge is questionable, Kant's investigation of transcendental logic offers a first and major step in resolving the problem of the separation between subject and object otherwise manifest as the paralysis of inquiry characteristic of

propositionalism, because it shifts philosophical focus away from an investigation into ‘what something is’ towards an inquiry into ‘how it is thinkable.’

That Kant’s account of transcendental method does not go far enough is evident in the dichotomy between what he calls reality-in-itself (*ding-an sich*) and the knowledge generated by the synthetic labor of understanding in conjunction with the contribution of the intuitions of space and time. In simple terms, the retention of the division between knower and known, in Kant’s work, is a product of Kant’s retention of the notion that a judgment qua a proposition is a representation of reality—i.e., that the ‘is’ of a proposition reflects (in some way) its correspondence to an objective world.¹⁶ In light of this assumption, however, Kant’s transcendental account offers not simply an answer to the question of *how* such representations are possible, but *why* they are justified. Still, the question of justification signals the fall into apologetic thinking so far as the need to justify a claim has all to do with the expectation (and hope) that it corresponds to an objective reality. That a claim may offer a representation falsifiable by experience of an outside world is the precise worry that guarantees the epistemological anxiety characteristic of propositionalism in general, grounded in the perpetual prospect that such knowledge claims will not successfully reach and/or be verified by experience. Ironically, Kant’s unusual association of transcendental logic, together with a representational account of propositions, only worsens the divide between knowledge synthetically generated by understanding and reality-in-itself (or the infamous *ding-an-sich*). To fully redirect philosophical reflection towards a more promising account of knowledge and inquiry requires a more radical association between method and content than Kant’s representationalism permits. Such a move is signaled in and by the reflective moment in Scriptural Reasoning, a move which achieves philosophical exposition in what may be referred to as both speculative and critical idealism.

As suggested, it is Kant’s move to develop a transcendental logic, or an account of the rules or principles which govern ‘how’ we think, which constitutes the central contribution of his work in the development of knowledge acquisition and production. To engage the turn to method fully, the question of how we make judgments needs to emerge purely without presuppositions, and in particular without the presupposition of the assignment of an attribute to a pre-determined

¹⁶ Undoubtedly, Kant’s transcendental logic challenges Cartesian representationalism, that is, the idea that we have mental images that correspond to a real objective world. Nonetheless, it is arguable that Kant’s account of intuition admits a degree of correspondence theory of representations into his account of judgment. Representations generated by the synthetic teamwork of sensibility and understanding produce judgments which are nonetheless representations of ‘representations’:

Judgment is...the mediate cognition of an object, hence the representation of a representation of it. In every judgment there is a concept that holds of many [representations], and that among this many also comprehends a given representation, which is then immediately referred to the object...All judgments are... functions of unity among our representations, since instead of an immediate representation a higher one, which comprehends this and other representations under itself, is used for the cognition of the object, and many possible cognitions are hereby drawn together into one (Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A68-69/B93-94).

According to Robert Hanna, “[T]he crucial take-away points here are (a) a judgment’s referential bottoming-out in intuitions/non-conceptual cognitions, which thereby constitute directly-referential singular terms in singular categorical judgments, that cannot be semantically replaced by individual concepts or definite descriptions without change or loss of meaning” (Robert Hanna, “Kant’s Theory of Judgment,” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2013).

concept. Propositional claims need to be unveiled for what they are: superficial expressions of many and varied methods or procedures of the activity of judgment-formation. Propositional assertion morphs into reflective analysis, whereby something is thought such that there is no difference between thought about an object and thought about how an object is thought. Method and content fuse together.

To explain this important move, let us return to our consideration of reflective SR. Recall the moment of indeterminacy in a Scriptural Reasoning exchange. Recourse by one participant to an axiomatic claim—registered as indeterminate for another and prompting participants (at times) to consider the word, verse, or phrase itself in relation to other words, verses, or things—which, when linked with the subject matter at hand, presents a ratio or a relation between the two generative of meaning or determinacy. The critical moment in reflective SR which both mirrors and exceeds Kant's recourse to transcendental logic emerges in the failure of the axiomatically presented claim to provide significance for a listener. In the wake of this absence, participants turn towards consideration of the relations between the subject matter at hand and other objects of consideration. But the conjuring of a possible relation is indeed the conjuring of a procedure, since relating words or verses or objects of consideration may take place in any number of ways and in light of any number of categories of association. Consider the Kantian categories alone: quantitative, qualitative, modal, and relational. Of course, Kant derives his categories from the accepted table of logical judgments, and yet, as we can see, the reflective moment in Scriptural Reasoning opens up the possibility of a full reconsideration of the so-called categories (and therefore their apparent universality). If Scriptural Reasoning therefore occasions a move to thinking about thinking, it does so only when this reflection upon logic derives or follows from an engagement with the subject matter under consideration. Intelligibility follows the lead of subject matter, and intelligibility is tantamount to the manner and (if repeated or repeatable) the ruled procedure or method whereby a subject matter is logically related to other elements (words, verses, things) with which it is environmentally linked or webbed.

A full investigation into the philosophical and practical benefits of the move to reflection in Scriptural Reasoning far exceeds the bounds of what can be accomplished in this paper. Still, it is worth looking very briefly at two avenues of philosophical development that those of us reflecting upon the character of reasoning exposed in SR practice might use as jumping-off points for deepening this account. They are Hegel's speculative and Hermann Cohen's critical idealism.

Both Hegel's speculative and Cohen's critical idealism reinforce the crucial connection between method and content also discoverable in reflective SR. In all three, the rerouting of thought away from propositional representationalism and towards the perpetual investigation into 'reasoning' as a rule-driven procedure or 'method' lifts knowledge acquisition out of the dynamic of agreement and disagreement characteristic of apologetic engagement. It permits, in other words, a free inquiry un-stymied by presupposed and fixed claims which inevitably give rise to conflict.

We see the conditions for the possibility of this approach to knowledge production in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, beginning as it does with a presuppositionless engagement of thinking with thinking. Determination of meaning emerges in *Logic* only by way of the movement of thought itself as it generates its own relations. That these relations constitute both the content and

therefore the method of thinking is clear insofar as content discovered by way of thought can be subsequently applied as a tool for achieving new insights. The content considered therefore generates the very rules by which it is considered further. And, therefore, reason is tantamount not to the determination of ‘fixed claims’ that represent an objective world, but rather to the ongoing assessment of the manner by which something is thinkable and then the subsequent execution of or playing out of that manner or logic. Reason in this capacity is always reasoning as an activity, and such reasoning is, we might say, always hypothetical insofar as the determination of method derives from the subject matter considered and because a fully determined method is something that must be applied. Methods change when objects of inquiry change, and rules are only as good as they are realizable. Every method is hypothetical, since its realization is contingent upon its application. Such an account is nothing other than the radicalization of the Kantian transcendental logic that takes place when neither method nor content are presupposed but both emerge out of the activity of reasoning itself as simultaneously subject and object, knower and known, method and content. As Steven Kaufer states, “Hegel denies that it makes sense to think of thought as opposed to its object,”¹⁷ but this is because, as I have suggested, he understands knowledge as the determination of the multifarious methods by means of which we think about something.

We find a similar association between the method of thought and its content in Cohen’s *System of Philosophy, First Part: Logic of Pure Knowledge*. Like Hegel, Cohen identifies reason with reasoning or the transcendental discernment of the rules or principles which regulate our knowing. Also like Hegel, Cohen maintains that the rules which govern our thinking derive from the very fact of our material engagement in the world. Method is directly linked to content for Cohen, and therefore philosophy is the study of *how* we think rather than *what* we think—i.e., philosophical reflection is non-propositional and non-metaphysical. Inquiry is the engagement with how we produce judgments. Arguably, Cohen’s thought is less radical than Hegel’s in its retention of what, for Cohen, is the starting point of transcendental reflection—namely the “fact of science.” Such a starting point includes methodological presuppositions which theoretically do not appear in Hegel’s *Logic*. Nonetheless, Cohen’s transcendental move from the fact of science to reflective consideration of how objects are produced in sciences following laws renders his work reflective, particularly since he maintains that such ‘laws’ not only ‘justify’ this apparently pre-existing ‘knowledge’ but are essential in the production of it. (Most notable among these laws or rules of thought/production is the concept of intensive magnitude, or what is known as the “infinitesimal method.”) Method does directly contribute to content after all. As Andrea Poma states, “Critical philosophy thus is valid as a science, since it is transcendental investigation of the conditions of the possibility of nature as an object of science, also since, in such an investigation, it discovers that philosophical principles are part of the principles of science.” Consequently, and this is the crucial move, “the productivity of logical thought is justified in *its reflectiveness* and not vice-versa.”¹⁸ Reflective thought does not stymie the

¹⁷ Stephan Kaufer, “Hegel to Frege: Concepts and Conceptual Content in Nineteenth-Century Logic,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 22, no. 3, 259-280.

¹⁸ Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. John Denton (Albany: SUNY Press, 1997), 49. Emphasis mine.

application of procedures of thinking, but as noted above, procedures are always hypothetical so far as rules must be applied. The application of a rule presupposes the precariousness of a rule or its predication upon its possible routine manifestation. There is a big difference between a claim concerning the ratio of a subject matter and its essence. Only the latter runs the risk of generating conflict and conversation-stopping disagreement, whereas the former functions as a means of access to knowledge.

By invoking Hegel and Cohen in this account of reflective SR, I do not mean to suggest that SR practice alone generates or should necessarily generate philosophical systems the likes of which we find in Hegel and Cohen. I do mean to suggest, however, that the apprehension of 'system,' and in particular the system of the sciences made possible by the reflective turn in Cohen and Hegel, is one that emerges out of SR practice such that the latter may contribute to a re-conceptualization of the nature of disciplinary organization in the academy. In simple terms, SR calls for a non-representationalist, non-propositionalist turn in academic work. The stakes of this move in academic inquiry are high, since it can be argued that the current division or strict separation of academic disciplines is at least partly rooted in a representational (propositional) approach to knowledge production. As mentioned above, such an approach is structured to promote at best comparison/contrast analyses within disciplinary work and from one discipline to another (i.e., where might historians and anthropologists and sociologists agree regarding characteristics of persons at a given time?) and at worst territorial disagreements resulting in the ever-deepening divide between academic disciplines and the culture of expertise which legitimizes this divide and isolation.

Moreover, reflective SR supports an end to disciplinary isolation not only because it is non-representational, but because as an exercise in the intersection of content and method it demonstrates that there is no one-to-one correlation between subject matter and method. Rather, the same subject matter can be thought in a myriad of ways. If anything, the move to method reverses the correlation between discipline and subject matter—i.e., the deeper the inquiry into a word, verse, or thing, the increased awareness of multiple procedures of thought enacted and the greater overlap between disciplines as they emerge from and converge in engagement with the shared environments within which they operate. A reflective intervention into academic inquiry is not tantamount to methodological nullification—only an appreciation of the intersection of routine procedures or patterns of reasoning as they follow and reflect the subject matter of investigation.

With these brief suggestions regarding the kind of significance SR practice can have in altering conceptions of academic work, we have moved from SR outward. Still, this extension from SR to inquiry is not in my view incidental. Rather, it reflects a frequently neglected recognition of the capacity of scriptural study to give rise to inquiry about the world. No reductive transition from revelation to an all encompassing and hegemonic reason which seeks to dissolve the claims of the former, the reasoning illuminated in SR practice is just that: a practice or an activity which has the capacity to stimulate a rich and complex and ongoing encounter between scriptural hermeneutics and knowledge acquisition.

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