

Peirce, pragmatism and the logic of scripture

Charles Peirce, founder of the American philosophic movement of pragmatism, offered the first logical critique of all the philosophies of “modernism” as failed attempts to replace the philosophic–religious systems of medieval Europe with systems of reason, alone. For Peirce, contemporary philosophy’s task is not to replace societal norms, but to disclose and clarify modern society’s deeper resources for correcting itself. In his later work, Peirce discovered that, against his own principles, his earlier doctrine of pragmatism had, itself, sought to replace rather than help correct the misguided reasonings of modern philosophy. He coined the term “pragmaticism” for his concluding studies of how to restore pragmatism to its task of helping repair, rather than recreate, the norms of modernity.

This book is the first attempt to interpret Peirce’s pragmaticism as a method of correctively rereading his earlier philosophic writing. Peter Ochs re-interprets pragmatism itself as a method of correctively rereading the errant philosophic writing of the great modern thinkers. As corrected by the pragmatists, the task of modern philosophy is, through writing, to diagram the otherwise hidden rules through which modern society repairs itself. Peirce labeled this elemental writing “enscribing” or “scripture.” Redescribing Peirce’s pragmatism as “the logic of scripture,” Ochs suggests that Christians and Jews may in fact reread pragmatism as a logic of Scripture: that is, as a modern philosopher’s way of diagramming the Bible’s rules for repairing broken lives and healing societal sufferings.

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for VANESSA OCHS
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CONTENTS

	List of abbreviations	<i>viii</i>
PART I	Peirce's pragmatic writing	1
1	Introduction: reading Peirce's pragmatism	3
2	Pragmatic methods of reading and interpretation	20
3	Problems in Peirce's early critique of Cartesianism	51
4	Problems in Peirce's early theory of pragmatism	74
5	Problems in Peirce's normative theory of pragmatism, 1878–1903	104
6	A pragmatic reading of Peirce's lectures on pragmatism	128
PART II	Peirce's pragmaticist writing	159
7	Irremediable vagueness in Peirce's pragmaticist writings: a plain-sense reading	161
8	Pragmaticism reread: from common-sense to the logic of scripture	246
	<i>Notes</i>	326
	<i>Index</i>	358

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used for some references in the main body of the text and in the endnotes.

- (4.656) *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss, and A. Burks, eds. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1935, 1958). References are to volume and paragraph number of this series; thus “4.564” is volume 4, paragraph 564.
- “Consequences” “Consequences of Four Incapacities,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2 (1868): 140–57. Repr. 5.264–317.
- “Fixation” “The Fixation of Belief,” *Popular Science Monthly*, 12 (1877): 1–5. Repr. 5.358–87.
- “Grounds” “Grounds of Validity of the Laws of Logic: Further Consequences of Four Incapacities,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2 (1868): 193–208. Repr. 5.318–357.
- “How to” “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” *Popular Science Monthly*, 12 (1877): 286–302. Repr. 5.388–410.
- M The Charles S. Peirce Papers, microfilm edition (Harvard University Library, Photographic Service, 1966). References numbered according to the system developed by Richard S. Robin, *Annotated Catalogue of the Papers of Charles S. Peirce* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1967), and as supplemented by Robin in “The Peirce Papers: A Supplementary Catalogue,” *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*, 7 (1971) : 37–57. For example, “M28: 2” means Robin’s catalogue listing 28, page 2.

“Questions” “Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 2 (1868): 103–4. Repr. 5.213–63.

Trans. *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* (journal).

W *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition*, Max Fisch *et al.*, eds.

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Note to the reader

Peirce delivers some of his most dramatic arguments through some of his more technical explorations in mathematics and logic. For the sake of interested readers, I reproduce and analyze some of those explorations, beginning in chapter 5, but I mark the more technical sections with asterisks and present them in a smaller font. More general readers may want to pass through these sections, getting a sense of their contributions without getting bogged down in too many details.