

In this model, the definition of "influence" of one group upon another must be broadened to include borrowing, rejecting, adopting, adapting, subverting, converting, combating and combining. Therefore, at least as important as determining whether a parallel indicates a genealogical or analogical relationship are the roles that a certain idea or method play within the two cultures. Subtle differences between the way a certain rhetorical technique is applied in two cultural contexts can reveal key distinctive features about each group. Even a genealogical connection can serve to highlight uniqueness as much as it indicates acculturation. Consequently, direct influence is just one question in a larger analysis of the comparative role that rhetoric plays within each subgroup as they respond to the same challenges. For example, we saw above that the Second Sophistic promoted Greek cultural dominance, history, and pride in the face of the Roman Empire – even if only in the imaginary world of declamation. Jews unsurprisingly took part in Greek *paideia* as an integrated subculture within the Greek East sharing the same antipathy to the Romans as their neighbors. At the same time, however, Jews also struggled to maintain their unique identity within the culture of the Greek East and so they rabbinized their imaginary world of declamation¹¹¹ and developed their own unique approach to truth, rhetoric, and interpretation.¹¹²

In a similar vein, the rabbis adopted many Greek techniques of exegesis and inference in their hermeneutical rules of midrash. Yet, they attributed these rules not to foreign origins but rather considered them to be part of the oral law revealed at Sinai.¹¹³ The hermeneutical rules became an integral part of rabbinic thought and their historical Greek origins shrank down to irrelevance. Regardless of whether it was done consciously, this move transformed an aspect of acculturation into a mark of rabbinic distinctiveness and independence.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ See Chapter 4.

¹¹² See pp. 23–35.

¹¹³ B. Sanhedrin 99a reads: "Even if one says, 'all of the Torah is from heaven except for this detail, this *qal va-homer*, or this *gezerah shavah*,' behold this fulfills 'For he has spurned the word of the Lord' (Num 15:31)." See parallel at Y. Sanhedrin 101r, 27d.

¹¹⁴ There are also other cases where the rabbis explicitly mark a certain idea as being a foreign import indicating that, at least in their own minds, they viewed such ideas as deriving from outside influences. For example, the phrase, "Greek wisdom," analyzed above as a reference to some aspect of classical rhetoric or philosophy, indicates a conscious awareness by the rabbis of a field of knowledge that was external to their culture and whose study they attempted to actively regulate. See, for example, Sifre Deut 343 on p. 257; and Satlow, "Beyond Influence," 41. Another example of an explicitly external marking is analyzed by Beth Berkowitz, *Execution and Invention*:

Viewing the rabbis as one of many neighboring provincials within a complex web of hegemonies opens the way to comparing various subcultures within the Empire that responded to the same challenges in different ways. For example, early church fathers explicitly distanced themselves from rhetoric even as they employed much of it in practice in their speeches and letters. Christianity developed a complex relationship with rhetoric and ultimately largely rejected its philosophical underpinnings.¹¹⁵ The rabbis, on the one hand, shared aspects of this complex relationship but, as we will demonstrate throughout this book, also fundamentally acceded to some of the major foundations of rhetorical thought.¹¹⁶ Regardless of whether these groups directly influenced each other, their comparison remains significant both because there were areas of overlap and because their convergences help to highlight their important points of contrast. The comparison between rabbis and church fathers defies any simple dichotomy between genealogy or analogy because the two groups worked within a common milieu, shared similar backgrounds and experiences, and had to work through parallel challenges. Both groups confronted the same cultural and political forces and negotiated overlapping but disparate solutions that worked best within their respective worldviews.

As a last point, situating the Jews as Roman provincials not only grants us perspective about the Jews and the writings of the rabbis, but also can mutually contribute to an understanding of the Roman Empire. Few ancient sources provide detailed evidence for the experience of provincial minorities and their relationship with the Empire as do Jewish writings from late antiquity. As long as we take into account the many differences between Jews and their neighbors, the example of the Jews can serve as a useful model for what other provincials experienced as well.¹¹⁷

PHILOSOPHY AND RHETORIC, TRUTH AND LANGUAGE

The scholars cited in the previous section have demonstrated that rabbinic literature is embedded within and shares characteristics with

Death Penalty Discourse in Early Rabbinic and Christian Cultures (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 159.

¹¹⁵ See pp. 268–76.

¹¹⁶ See pp. 266–87.

¹¹⁷ See Dohrmann and Reed, "Rethinking Romanness," 8–9; David Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 26 and 128; and Martin Goodman, ed. *Jews in a Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 1–14. See also further methodological considerations in the next section and p. 83.

many aspects of classical rhetoric. While these findings carry wide consensus, there remains the more fundamental question as to the extent to which the rabbis accepted the philosophical underpinnings of classical rhetoric. In order to penetrate into this issue, we must first review in broad strokes the history of the debates between philosophers and sophists on the issues of truth, subjectivity, language, and interpretation. The assessment of how much rhetoric there is in rabbinic literature is not merely a technical measure of how many times a certain Hellenistic genre or theme arises. Rather, as the following review will demonstrate, this analysis reaches into the innermost depths of the rabbinic thought process and thereby sheds light on many aspects of the rabbinic literary output and worldview.

Ancient epistemology offers two basic views about truth: Plato taught that truth is singular, objective and unchanging, while the sophists viewed reality as being multifaceted, relative and in constant flux.¹¹⁸ These two epistemologies, in turn, dictate two radically different modes of reasoning: the sophists engaged in rhetorical argumentation with the assumption that the most convincing case would establish the best interpretation within a particular interpretive community. Plato and his followers, on the other hand, eschewed rhetoric in favor of logical proofs that reveal the absolute and immutable truth. The tension between the sophists and the philosophers continued for centuries as the schools of philosophy and those of rhetoric competed for students and prestige. Of course, Plato himself was the master rhetorician using the dialogic format to drive his interlocutors into paradoxes and self-contradictions, even as he argued for the dangers of such deceptive modes of argumentation. But Plato is in this sense typical of writers in both the philosophic and Christian traditions who at the same time polemicize against rhetoric even while applying its methodology.¹¹⁹

Plato's attack on rhetoric runs throughout his dialogues and is a central theme in the *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias*. Socrates equates rhetoric

¹¹⁸ See Bruce McComiskey, "Neo-Sophistic Rhetorical Theory: Sophistic Precedents for Contemporary Epistemic Rhetoric," *Rhetorical Society Quarterly* 24, no. 3/4 (1994): 16-24; and his book, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); Scott Consigny, "Nietzsche's Reading of the Sophists," *Rhetoric Review* 13, no. 1 (1994): 5-26; and Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), 3-25. Predictably, not everyone agrees with this reading of the sophists; see Handelman, "Edward Schiappa's Reading of the Sophists," *Rhetoric Review* 14, no. 2 (1996): 253-69.

¹¹⁹ See p. 275.

with demagoguery, using verbal tricks to convince the masses of what is beneficial to the speaker without any concern for justice or truth.¹²⁰ Rhetoric is not an art but merely a knack for producing pleasure and for imitating the persuasive effects of philosophy but without any substance.¹²¹ Only philosophy, he argues, can rightly be called an art because the philosopher understands the truth about the subject he analyzes in all its particulars and definitions; only he is able to discern the nature of the soul of his audience and how to best form a speech that will lead the soul to attain the truth.¹²² Only through philosophy can we rise above the world of illusions and bodies in order that our souls may understand the ideal forms, the realm of unchanging truth.¹²³

This debate predates Plato and continues throughout the history of Western thought. Plato's belief that there exists one objective and unchanging truth follows the view of Parmenides before him.¹²⁴ Rhetoric, on the other hand, assumes the worldview of Protagoras that "man is the measure of all things, of the things that are that they are, and of the things that are not that they are not."¹²⁵ Because objective truth does not exist, or at least is inaccessible, truth must be defined subjectively as the common consent reached after both sides have been heard and weighed. This split between philosophy and rhetoric, between idea and word, between truth and trickery served as a foundation for Western metaphysics for centuries to come. Enlightenment thinkers strove to achieve, through human reason, absolute truth in language, logic, mathematics, and physical and social sciences.¹²⁶ Modern literary and post-structuralist theory eschews the possibility of objective interpretation and absolute truth that had formed the basis of Western philosophy since Plato. Instead, it embeds meaning in language and considers interpretation as a complex interaction between the reader and the text,

¹²⁰ *Phaedrus* 260 and 272d-e.

¹²¹ *Gorgias* 462c-466b. See Jeremy Bell, "'Empeiria kai Tribe': Plato on the 'Art' of Flattery in Rhetoric and Sophistry," *Epoche: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2011): 379-94.

¹²² *Phaedrus* 270b-272b, 277b-c.

¹²³ *Republic* 409d-513e, and *Phaedo* 66d-e.

¹²⁴ Robert Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato and Their Successors* (London: Routledge, 2005), 9-14.

¹²⁵ Plato, *Theaetetus* 152a, and *Cratylus* 385e. See Susan Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 49-50; Stanley Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally: Change, Rhetoric, and the Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies* (Durham: Duke University, 1989), 480; and Rosental, "Shnei devarim," 17.

¹²⁶ See Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); and p. 100 n. 98.

which is itself a product of prior intertexts without beginning or end. This instability of meaning does not deny the possibility of interpretation and understanding but rather prompts us to locate meaning in the contextual and persuasive power of language.¹²⁷

Where do the rabbis fit into this controversy? That is a fundamental question running through this book and it is not easy to answer considering that the Talmud does not address this topic in any explicit and systematic way. However, a broad view of rabbinic literature suggests that the rabbis succeeded in charting a unique and sophisticated approach that denies the very dichotomy between truth and words. Susan Handelman assesses that the rabbis "never suffered this schism; their concepts of language and interpretation not only preserve but exalt the innate logic of language."¹²⁸ The rabbis, to some degree, remained on the fringes of the controversies between Platonists and sophists and thereby preserved the more ancient unity of thought and language that has only recently resurfaced in the linguistic turn in Western philosophy. Let us review some manifestations of the rabbinic viewpoint discussed in previous scholarship as a backdrop for the findings of this study.

Scholars have discussed various points of evidence that the rabbinic view of truth and language contrasts with Platonic conceptions. On a linguistic level, rabbinic Hebrew possesses no word for the Greek conception of truth (ἀλήθεια) as an absolute, universal and unchangeable

¹²⁷ See Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense (1873)," in *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*, ed. S.L. Gilman, C. Blair, and D.J. Parent (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 246–57; Ferdinand Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1959); Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972); and Anthony Reynolds, "The Linguistic Return: Deconstruction as Textual Messianism," *SubStance* 43, no. 1 (2014): 152–65.

¹²⁸ Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 11. See similarly Faur, *Golden Doves*, xxvi, cited p. 31 n. 147. Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), xii, rightly criticizes these works for making sweeping generalities about Jewish thinking across Jewish writers of all times and places, including medieval Spain and modern France. Nevertheless, Boyarin agrees that contemporary literary theory's "questioning of the Platonic-Aristotelian (ultimately Enlightenment) understanding of language makes possible a space for a more sympathetic reading of midrash as an interpretive act" (ibid., x). Despite their differences, these three writers agree that the Talmudic rabbis maintained a counter-culture to Platonist ideas and thus prefigured modern theory. See also Sergey Dolgopolski, *What Is Talmud?: The Art of Disagreement* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 151.

rational order. Hebrew *emet* refers in legal contexts to procedural validity¹²⁹ and in other contexts means sincerity and trustworthiness; it rarely if ever means ontological truth.¹³⁰ José Faur demonstrates the alliance of the rabbis with the rhetorical tradition in this regard when he writes:

The intellectual space of the sages is the realm of the verisimilar. It pertains to rhetoric rather than metaphysics. One will fail to find in the Talmud formal and analytical proofs, proceeding, as with the Scholastics, from syllogisms accompanied by axioms, premises and conclusions. Talmudic "proofs" are not "demonstrative" – structured from formal deductions and inductions. Talmudic dialectics deal with probable and improbable alternatives, inferences and analogue constructs, indeterminate and statistical knowledge, variables and quantitative differences. Let us note that the Talmudic lexicon does not register the words "rational" (מושכל) or "necessary" (הכרח). Its dialectic is expository: it proposes the "reasonable" (סברא), not the absolute. The divergent and contradictory opinions of the *emora'im* are not classified as "true" (אמת) and "false" (שקר).¹³¹

Faur here distinguishes between metaphysics, which aims at truth through logical proofs, and rhetoric, which debates probabilities through dialectics. He places the rabbis in the latter category and thus explains why Hebrew lacks a word for ontological truth. Throughout this book I will use the word "truth" in both senses to refer to universal ontological

¹²⁹ See Christine Hayes, *What's Divine about Divine Law?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 169–245; Christine Hayes, "Legal Truth, Right Answers and Best Answers: Dworkin and the Rabbis," *Diné Israel* 25 (2008): 73–121; and Chaya Halberstam, *Law and Truth in Biblical and Rabbinic Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 90. Y. Sanhedrin 11:1, 18a, for example, makes the extraordinary statement that even God must follow procedure in order to achieve truth: "R. Yohanan said, The Holy One, blessed be He, does not do anything in his world without first consulting with the heavenly court. What is the source? 'The word is truth and a great army' (Dan 10:1) – when is the seal of the Holy One, blessed be He, true? When he consults the heavenly court."

¹³⁰ See, for example, Avot d'Rabbi Natan A 34, 36; Gen Rabbah 96; Y. Sanhedrin 11:5, 30c; and B. Sanhedrin 85b. There are some instances where *emet* may mean essence or absolute truth such as in Avot d'Rabbi Natan A 6; and B. Megillah 16b. See further at Anthony C. Thiselton, "Truth," in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Brown Colin (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 3:874–902.

¹³¹ José Faur, *The Horizontal Society: Understanding the Covenant and Alphabetic Judaism* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2008), 1:277. See similarly José Faur, "Retórica y hermenéutica: Vico y la tradición rabínica," in *Pensar para el nuevo siglo: Giambattista Vico y la cultura Europea*, ed. E. Hidalgo-Serna (Napoli: La Città del Sole, 2001): 928. Translation by David Ramirez available at <http://moreshetsepharad.org/>.

reality as well as to legally valid or prophetically authenticated statements, making sure that I clarify to which definition I refer whenever the context does not make it sufficiently evident. As we will see in the Conclusion, this definitional gap allows for the rabbis to maintain a multivocalic notion of truth that incorporates the subjectivity of human interpretation even as it ultimately derives from divine prophecy.¹³²

Regarding the term for "word," there is also a significant contrast between Greek *logos* and Hebrew *dabar*, which both developed a complex web of meanings in various centuries. Citing Giambattista Vico, Faur contends that in primeval mythical times, *logos* meant both word and idea, reflecting the view that saw no distinction between knowledge and its articulation.¹³³ For the rest of history, however, Greek refers to a lexical word using the terms *lexis* or *onoma*. *Logos*, in contrast, refers to the meaning of words and can be variously translated: explanation, argument, theory, or rational discourse. As Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, "Greek philosophy more or less began with the insight that a word is only a name – i.e., that it does not represent true being."¹³⁴ Hebrew *dabar*, on the other hand, refers to word, event, and thing, which reflects a unity between the word and the world such that to interpret the word is to understand reality and vice versa.¹³⁵ Modern linguistic theory has now revived the ancient rhetorical view that rejects the possibility of purely conceptual ideas and instead insists that ideas are integrally dependent on words.¹³⁶ Both regarding conceptions of truth and

¹³² See pp. 277–87.

¹³³ José Faur, "The Splitting of the Logos: Some Remarks on Vico and the Rabbinic Tradition," *Poiesis: New Vico Studies* 3 (1985): 87; and see Giambattista Vico, *The New Science*, trans. Thomas G. Bergin and Max H. Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), 401; and Sandra Rudnick Luft, *Vico's Uncanny Humanism: Reading the New Science between Modern and Postmodern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 88–91.

¹³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), 406. Italics in original.

¹³⁵ See also Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 67–9 and 184; Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 3–9, 32–3; and Daniel Boyarin, "Moslem, Christian, and Jewish Cultural Interaction in Sefardic Talmudic Interpretation," *Review of Rabbinic Judaism* 5, no. 1 (2002): 6.

¹³⁶ Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, 111–12 writes:

Psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.

language, therefore, Hebrew never accepted the dichotomies introduced by Plato and the philosophers that followed in his wake.

The Hebrew conception of language can help explain the methods of midrashic hermeneutics. As Isaak Heinemann explains, rabbinic midrash assumes the "independence of the parts of speech" such that "one cannot describe the interpretive methodology of the rabbis using the rationalist hermeneutical structure that is based on the complete dominance of the *logos*."¹³⁷ By *logos*, Heinemann refers to the idea in the author's head and the conception of meaning in the reader's mind as he or she translates ink splashes into letters, words, sentences, and ideas. The rationalists of Western thought demote words to a mere vehicle to convey meaning, rendering them dispensable once the idea is understood. Organic thinking, on the other hand, denies that words are mere vessels for *logos* but rather imbues words with independent significance. Processing language requires the reader to enter a vicious hermeneutic circle of turning particular signs into a larger idea and at the same time using the larger context to interpret and negate the meanings of those signs. Since the production of meaning from words is in all cases subjective and uncertain, we should acknowledge the legitimacy of exploring alternate and even radical ways of reading. According to Heinemann, midrash does just that by performing a close and careful reading of the letters and words but still allowing for creativity in framing the context, multiplying possibilities in making connections, and freeing each word to act as an independent entity.

The logocentrism of Plato engenders a focus on ideal unchanging truths and relegates language to a mere image of reality.¹³⁸ That is why Plato can accuse the sophists of misusing language in a way that divorces it from truth.¹³⁹ For the rabbis, however, truth and meaning are integrally bound up with the words themselves. Words can be misunderstood but they can neither be dispensed with nor confined to just one correct interpretation. A word is an active dynamic force, especially when it is the word of God: "My word is like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that shatters rock" (Jer 23:29). The rabbis derive from

¹³⁷ Isaak Heinemann, *Darkhe ha-'aggada* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1970), 102. See also Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 189.

¹³⁸ Plato, *Cratylus*, 439a–b; and see Viktor Ilievski, "Language and Knowledge in Plato's *Cratylus*," *Filozofija* 35 (2013): 7–25.

¹³⁹ Rachel Barney, *Names and Nature in Plato's *Cratylus** (New York: Routledge, 2001), 161, writes that for Plato, "names are ontologically degenerate and therefore potentially deceptive."

here: "Just as a hammer disperses many sparks so does a single verse issue forth many senses."¹⁴⁰ Prophetic language does not point to just one idea in the mind of the author; rather, linguistic ambiguity necessarily and legitimately engenders interpretive polysemy.¹⁴¹ Therefore, the full scope of the prophetic message can only be appreciated through unpacking its full diversity of possible meanings. As Emmanuel Levinas eloquently states: "Something would remain unrevealed in the Revelation if a single soul in its singularity were to be missing from the exegesis."¹⁴²

The dynamic power of language also manifests itself in the role of speech in creation. As the Psalmist writes: "By the word of the Lord the heavens were made" (33:6). God forms each part of the cosmos with speech and provides them a name (Gen 1:5, 8, 10) just as humans can conceive of the world only through language (Gen 2:19–20). The words that God used to create the world, the rabbis explain, are none other than the Torah itself. The Torah preceded creation as a blueprint for the universe:

In the usual way of the world, a king of flesh and blood does not build a palace with his own skill but with the skill of an architect. And the architect does not build it in his mind but he uses a record book or a pinax to know how to make rooms and mosaics. So too the Holy One, blessed be He, looks at the Torah and creates the world.¹⁴³

The rabbis form their conception of the world primarily through the text of the Torah and for that reason can state that the Torah existed prior to

¹⁴⁰ B. Sanhedrin 34a. See analysis at Faur, *Golden Doves*, xiii; Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 67; Susan Handelman, "Fragments of the Rock: Contemporary Literary Theory and the Study of Rabbinic Texts – A Response to David Stern," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 89–90; David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1996), 17–18; Stern, "Literary Criticism or Literary Homilies? Susan Handelman and the Contemporary Study of Midrash," *Prooftexts* 5 (1985): 101; Azzan Yadin, *Scripture as Logos: Rabbi Ishmael and the Origins of Midrash* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2004), 69–79; Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 189–92; Boyarin, "Shattering the Logos – or, The Talmuds and the Genealogy of Indeterminacy," in *The Talmud Yerushalmi and Graeco-Roman Culture III*, ed. Peter Schäfer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002): 273–99; Hidary, *Dispute*, 19 and 27; and Steven Fraade, "Response to Azzan Yadin-Israel on Rabbinic Polysemy: Do They 'Preach' What They Practice?," *AJS Review* 38 (2014): 353 n. 31.

¹⁴¹ On polysemy in midrashic interpretation, see Stern, *Midrash and Theory*, 15–38.

¹⁴² Levinas, *Beyond the Verse*, 171.

¹⁴³ Gen Rabbah 1:1. See also parallel at Tanhuma to Gen 1:1.

the universe. This midrash has a likely ancestor in Plato's *Timaeus*, which explains that the Creator gazed at the eternal forms as a model for constructing the world.¹⁴⁴ Significantly, the midrash replaces the alphabetic ideal forms with the words of the Torah.¹⁴⁵ Conversely, when God threatens to destroy the Israelites for sinning with the golden calf, Moses demands that God forgive their sin: "And if not, then erase me from the book that you have written" (Exod 32:32). A person's existence depends on his being written in God's book and his being killed is an act of textual erasure. Here again, reality is inextricably bound with words and the former disappears when the latter is erased. As Faur writes: "In the mind of the Hebrews, the Universe is represented as the writing or active speech of God."¹⁴⁶

Faur continues:

In the West, "philosophy" stood in hierarchical opposition to "rhetoric" . . . Rabbinic tradition is the only intellectual and cultural movement to have continued developing since antiquity without a primaeval rupture – an inaugural split – resulting in an endless series of hierarchical opposition.¹⁴⁷

Handelman similarly writes: "The struggle between philosophy and rhetoric in Greece ended in philosophy's conquest," whereas the rabbis retained an ancient integrated worldview.¹⁴⁸ David Stern

¹⁴⁴ *Timaeus*, 27–9.

¹⁴⁵ See Faur, *Horizontal Society*, 1.8–12; Faur, *Golden Doves*, 138; and Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 171; Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 38; Henry Fischel, "The Transformation of Wisdom in the World of Midrash," in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. Robert Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975): 80 and 95; Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1.198–200; and George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era, the Age of the Tannaim* (1927; repr., New York: Schocken Books, 1971), 1.267. A conduit for this tradition from Plato to the rabbis may have been Philo, *On Creation*, 15–25, who repeats Plato's cosmology and adds a parable of a king hiring an engineer. His parable, however, lacks a written blueprint, thus highlighting the contrast with the rabbis who move from forms to text.

¹⁴⁶ Faur, *Golden Doves*, xxv.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxvi. See further discussion at Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, "When the Reader Is in the Write," *Prooftexts* 7 (1987): 194–205.

¹⁴⁸ Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 11; and see Q. 26, and further elaboration at David A. Frank, "Arguing with God, Talmudic Discourse, and the Jewish Countermodel: Implications for the Study of Argumentation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 41 (2004): 71–86; and David A. Frank, "The Jewish Countermodel: Talmudic Argumentation, the New Rhetoric Project, and the Classical Tradition of Rhetoric," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 26 (2003): 163–94.

counters this strict dichotomy between the West and the rabbis in his critique of Handelman:

The major thrust of scholarship about Rabbinics for the last century has been to demonstrate that Rabbinic Judaism adapted and transformed the ideas of Hellenistic civilization to serve its own purposes, sometimes to make them the fount of its religious system: an idea as central as that extolling the study of Torah as the greatest commandment, for example, can be traced to analogous claims made for the pursuit of philosophy in classical Greece.¹⁴⁹

Stern takes Handelman to task for dismissing the relevance of Lieberman's *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* and similar scholarship with the justification that she focuses on "structural differences between Rabbinic and Greek thought"¹⁵⁰ rather than historical influence. Handelman counters that Lieberman himself only claims that the terminology of the thirteen hermeneutical principles are borrowed from the Greek rhetors, but not the forms of reasoning themselves.¹⁵¹ She does admit that there exist "real influences of Hellenistic culture on the rabbis" but she chooses to emphasize the differences between them that are manifest in "specific attitudes towards language."¹⁵² Stern, however, accuses Handelman of "falling into disingenuous generalizations."¹⁵³ In the end both agree that there are similarities and differences between the two traditions, but neither ventures to carefully delineate what they are.

I agree to a large extent with Faur and Handelman that the rabbis retained elements of a primeval organic system of thought. At the same time, a stark opposition between the West and the rabbis cannot accurately capture the nuance and complexity of each group and of their

¹⁴⁹ David Stern, "Moses-side: Midrash and Contemporary Literary Criticism," *Proof texts* 4 (1985): 196.

¹⁵⁰ Handelman, *Slayers of Moses*, 51. Italics are in the original.

¹⁵¹ See further on this in Chapter 5.

¹⁵² Handelman, "Fragments of the Rock," 88.

¹⁵³ Stern, "Moses-side," 196. See also the criticism of Philip S. Alexander, "Quid Athenis et Hierosolymis? Rabbinic Midrash and Hermeneutics in the Graeco-Roman World," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, ed. P. R. Davies and R. T. White (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990): 101-24; and Philip S. Alexander, "Hellenism and Hellenization as Problematic Historiographical Categories," in *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001): 67 and 273 n. 79; William Scott Green, "Romancing the Tome: Rabbinic Hermeneutics and the Theory of Literature," *Semina* 40 (1987): 147-68; and discussion at Catherine Hezser, *The Social Structure of the Rabbinic Movement in Roman Palestine* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 17-19; and Hiday, *Dispute*, 17 n. 65.

interaction. In fact, "the West" includes many and varied voices (including those of the rabbis). Plato himself is inconsistent in his description of the *logos* and the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy.¹⁵⁴ Aristotle certainly did not denigrate rhetoric but rather considered it to be a counterpart or outgrowth of dialectic¹⁵⁵ and consequently closely related to philosophical proof. In contrast to Plato who describes rhetoric as a counterpart to cookery,¹⁵⁶ Aristotle sees a proper place for rhetoric in the pursuit of truth as a form of persuasion that is weaker than demonstration but still appropriate for given audiences and subjects.¹⁵⁷ Rhetoric does assist in achieving justice because "the true and the just are by nature stronger than their opposites" and will prevail through debate. Furthermore, he writes, "one should be able to argue persuasively on either side of a question, just as in the use of syllogisms, not that we may actually do both (for one should not persuade what is debased) but in order that it may not escape our notice what the real state of the case is and that we ourselves may be able to refute if another person uses speech unjustly."¹⁵⁸

Students in the Roman Empire would typically study first in a rhetorical school and then some would continue to a philosophical school without needing to take sides regarding their epistemological assumptions but would instead be engaged in both. The two disciplines were deeply intertwined and mutually reliant to the extent that "the philosophers looked upon the art [of rhetoric] as a practical technique that was quite legitimate in its own way and had a perfectly proper place in culture as a preliminary study, like grammar or mathematics; and they had no compunction about teaching it."¹⁵⁹ We therefore find approaches to truth that depend on both sophistic and philosophic assumptions side by side within Greco-Roman intellectual discourse.

On the rabbinic front, we must acknowledge that the rabbis were embedded in a deeply Hellenistic world, not isolated from it. In some cases, the rabbis recognized a Hellenistic idea as external to themselves

¹⁵⁴ In *Sophist* 263e, Plato identifies *logos* with *diánoia* (thinking) except that the latter refers to the "silent inner conversation of the soul with itself" whereas the former describes "the stream that flows from the soul in vocal utterance." In this articulation, thought and word are unified. Translation from Plato, *Theaetetus and Sophist*, trans. H. N. Fowler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921).

¹⁵⁵ Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, I.1.1.

¹⁵⁶ McComiskey, *Gorgias* 464b.

¹⁵⁷ See Brad McAdon, "Rhetoric Is a Counterpart of Dialectic," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 34, no. 2, 113-50; and Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 31 n. 4.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I.1.13. See also Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally*, 478-9; and here in p. 235 n. 81.

¹⁵⁹ Marrou, *History of Education*, 211.

and explicitly decided to adopt it, adapt it, or reject it.¹⁶⁰ But in most cases, as discussed above, Hellenistic modes of thought, style, stories, and values simply pervaded the shared environment. Greek expressions and values resonated with biblical and other ancient traditions and became absorbed into each other and merged into a Hebraic-Hellenistic conglomerate.

Most recently, Sergey Dolgopolski has shown that Talmud is not reducible to either philosophy or rhetoric. Rather,

[the sages] have their own inevitable metaphysical, yet not philosophical position that enables the unique Talmudic approach to learning not merely as a repetition of tradition, but rather, in its highest form, as a process otherwise known in rhetoric as the process of (re)discovery of the past through a rational rhetorical (re)invention of it.¹⁶¹

Unlike philosophers who seek a contextless ultimate truth, the rabbis adhere to the oral and written Torah traditions for their worldview. Unlike the sophists (at least as portrayed by the philosophers) who deny the possibility of truth, the Talmud does seek out Divine truths from the Torah, even as the rabbis recognize that that past is "reachable only through the process of rational rhetorical reinvention."¹⁶² For this reason, "the Talmudic masters intrinsically turn to both philosophy and sophistry/rhetoric without, however, conflating their position with either of them."¹⁶³ I largely identify with this assessment, as will become clearer throughout this book.

In sum, it would be erroneous to portray the rabbinic worldview as being either completely dependent on or completely different from Greek philosophy or rhetoric. Rather than adopting either of these extreme views, this book argues that a complex combination of adoption and adaptation can best explain Talmudic rhetorical structure and reasoning. We can speak of rabbinic thought as a counter-culture to the Greco-Roman intellectual world only to the extent that we take into account the significant diversity of opinions within the Greco-Roman tradition itself. Philosophy and rhetoric each maintained many proponents in a lively and continuous debate among Greek thinkers who often combined elements of each in various ways. Therefore, any opposition by the rabbis to metaphysical truths or resistance by them to

¹⁶⁰ See p. 22 n. 114.

¹⁶¹ Dolgopolski, *What Is Talmud*, 154.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 158.

rhetorical argumentation may not be counter-cultural so much as siding with one or another Greco-Roman school. At the same time, we must also explore the prospect that the rabbis maintained their own distinctive voice that combined elements of various aspects of their surrounding popular and intellectual culture and integrated them within their own textual, social and legal world.

The goal of this book is to analyze how the rabbis fused together the various elements of the biblical organic tradition with the ambient culture of rhetorical training and their own focus on the transmission of oral law. As we will see in the Conclusion, assessing questions of truth and argumentation through the lens of prophetic Scripture necessarily prompted the rabbis to create their own unique and instructive contribution to these enduring issues. The sages of the Talmud adopt neither a Platonic monistic truth, nor a skeptical view that rejects any objective truth as the sophists do. We will demonstrate that, instead, they conceive of a model of multiple truths embedded within the words of the prophets than can be accessed through human interpretation.

ON RHETORICAL ARRANGEMENT

Several chapters of this book¹⁶⁴ will analyze the structure of rabbinic sermons and sugyot in relation to the arrangement of sections taught in Greco-Roman handbooks, the most important being those of Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian, the anonymous *Ad Herennium*, and *On Invention* attributed to Hermogenes of Tarsus (flourished second century CE).¹⁶⁵ This section will summarize the basics of rhetorical arrangement and thereby serve as a background for the upcoming analyses.

Cicero describes five stages in the study of rhetoric:

Invention (*inventio*) is the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's case plausible. Arrangement (*dispositio*) is the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order. Expression (*elocutio*) is the fitting of the proper language to the

¹⁶⁴ See pp. 61-67, 68-9, 95-101, 114-6, 122-6, and 190-3. Two New Testament examples are also analyzed pp. 44-6 and 270-1.

¹⁶⁵ I have used the following editions: Aristotle, *On Rhetoric* (full citation in n. 12); Cicero, *On Invention* (full citation in n. 12); Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* (full citation in n. 1); *Ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); and George A. Kennedy, *Invention and Method: Two Rhetorical Treatises from the Hermogenic Corpus* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).