

Middle East with the West in the last two centuries. Those parts of the Middle East which fall outside of the Ottoman-oriented narrative (i.e., Iran and parts of Arabia) are effectively brought into the story through the use of historical comparisons.

Cleveland's treatment of intellectual history is stimulating and reflects his own research interests in the ideologies of Arabism and Islamism during the first half of the 20th century. Instructors will find valuable tools here for introducing their students to the complexities and variations of Middle Eastern political thought, including Islamic revivalism, which Cleveland insists not be treated in a monochromatic or simplistic way. He argues that Islamic revivalist movements are part of, rather than an atavistic reaction against, the transformations of the last century and a half; and he gives students enough leads to introduce them to the various dimensions of this question.

The author's treatment of the other Middle Eastern "hot button," namely, the conflict over Israel/Palestine, is likewise pedagogically sound. He places the emergence of the "Palestine question" in its regional and international context, and charts the development of Israel and of Palestinian nationalism since 1948 in a lucid and dispassionate manner. He explains the significance of the Palestine question for Arab regional politics, without allowing the Arab-Israeli conflict to crowd out discussions of other regional issues. Cleveland's Middle East extends from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east and from Turkey in the north to the Arabian Peninsula in the south. All are treated in ways that allow instructors to bring out comparisons and contrasts among them, and that suggest further lines of inquiry for students to pursue.

In sum, this textbook is a worthy effort and will be appreciated by instructors and students of modern Middle Eastern history. Students of religion will find useful pointers and guides here for an assessment of modern Islamic political and social thought in the Middle East, plus suggestions for further reading on these subjects.

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### **The Rhetoric of the Babylonian Talmud, Its Social Meaning and Context**

Jack N. Lightstone

Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1994. xiv + 317 p.

There are four principal components to the argument of this monograph by Jack Lightstone (Concordia University). First, there is a rhetorical characterization of the style of the Babylonian Talmud that focusses upon its dialectical complexity and esotericism. Towards this end, he presents a selection of Talmudic passages from tractates *Avodah zarah* and *Bekhorot*, schematized in a manner that distinguishes between: (a) "dialectical formularies" (logical operators that reflect the argumentation of individual literary units; (b) "structural formularies" (more general formulas that serve to combine the dialectical units into more extensive literary compositions); and (c) the actual contents, traditions and sources, etc. to which the dialectical analysis is being applied. Lightstone observes that the types of formulas that are built into the structure of the Babylonian Talmud encourage cer-

tain types of discourse, notably an ongoing critique and analysis of the received tradition. The processes of questioning and inquiry are paramount, not the reaching of conclusions.

Second, a theory is proposed about the historical sequence and social implications of the redaction of the Babylonian Talmud; namely, that the literary process coincided with, and was instrumental to, the consolidation of formal academies (*Yeshivot*) at the close of the Talmudic era. Lightstone argues that this transition occurred around 475-652 c.e. and was affected by the centralizing policies of later Sassanian monarchs which deprived the Rabbis of their roles in civic administration. Third, the rhetorical features described in the first component above are seen to be consistent with the purposes of the second. Lightstone discerns in the methods of Talmudic dialectic (in which scholarship becomes an end unto itself and a criterion for religious authority) an adaptation to the Babylonian Rabbis' loss of political and communal authority.

Last, comparative studies of some other rabbinic compendia serve to highlight the distinctiveness of the Babylonian Talmud. For example, comparison with equivalent passages in the Palestinian Talmud shows that the Babylonian Talmud is far more extensive, "spinning out" elaborate literary units whose components frequently bear no direct relation to the Mishnah which the Talmud is supposed to be interpreting. This indicates that the distinctive rhetorical structure of the Babylonian Talmud was introduced as part of the final redactional process and does not preserve features of rabbinic study that existed in earlier generations.

Lightstone seems to take a roundabout route to arrive at an obvious destination, that the Babylonian Talmud is a work of intricate dialectical logic in which the method, not the result, is of chief importance. By formulating his argument in terms of "rhetoric"—and his limited selection of topics falls far short of a thorough study of the Talmud's rhetorical structures—he has unnecessarily complicated the issue.

Furthermore, I perceived serious methodological problems at several stages in Lightstone's argumentation, which raised doubts about the soundness of his methods and conclusions. In particular, he seems to be unfamiliar with existing scholarly resources (e.g., he does not utilize the important JTS manuscript of the Babylonian Talmud *Avodah zarah*, though it is readily available in an excellent facsimile edition) and out of touch with recent currents of Talmudic studies, which have proposed more sophisticated theories on most of the pivotal issues discussed in this work. This is particularly noticeable with regard to the important studies by Shamma Friedman, David Weiss-Halivni (in the recent volumes of his Hebrew commentary) and others, who have provided elaborate taxonomies of the anonymous ("Saboraic," "Stammaitic," etc.) redactional strata of the Babylonian Talmud and their creative reinterpretations of earlier traditions. These studies, taken in combination with examinations of the textual history of the Babylonian Talmud, indicate an extremely fluid transmission in which the "structural formularies" were not considered official or "canonical" portions of the Talmud for several centuries after the time period to which Lightstone ascribes them. (Their wording is freely altered in existing manuscript traditions, and they are routinely disregarded by Geonic and medieval compendia.) All this calls into question the legitimacy of Lightstone's model of a one-time publication of a "closed document" in the sixth

or seventh century. (Lightstone makes frequent allusions to "final or penultimate" redactors, but I was unable to locate his explanation of the implied redactional model.)

With respect to several issues, Lightstone seems to have coerced the evidence to fit his theories. In some cases he is open about this; for example, he acknowledges that in asserting that the Babylonian Amora'im actively opposed the establishment of institutional academies he has exceeded D. Goodblatt's rather limited and agnostic conclusions about our lack of evidence for such academies (conclusions which have not stood up well to subsequent scholarly criticism, particularly by I. Gafni). In other instances he is less forthcoming. Thus, by glibly stereotyping the Mishnah as a collection of "lists," he obscures the logical profundity of many of its units and ignores one of its most significant characteristics, namely, its incorporation of *disputes*. The presence of (usually unexplained) disputes between authoritative sages would naturally inspire commentators to uncover the roots of the disagreements, submitting them to tests of consistency, and—since these authorities were, after all, revered Rabbis whose dicta had been selected for inclusion in an official compendium—proving the validity of the conflicting positions. Thus, many of the most salient features of Talmudic dialectic can be explained as arising naturally from the requirements of a commentary, irrespective of the social circumstances at the time of the redaction. Similarly, by focussing on the limited "rhetorical" vocabulary of Palestinian Talmud, the author has obscured the more significant fact that the assumptions and methods of the two Talmuds are essentially similar, and that many of the differences are of degree, challenging his arguments about the uniqueness of the Babylonian Talmud. Many other examples could be cited of Lightstone's failures to consider alternative ways of accounting for the data. In short, in its current form this monograph has failed to argue its position in a persuasive manner. It is to be hoped that Lightstone will return to the topic from a more solid methodological perspective, taking into account some of the issues raised here.

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### **The Philosophy of Religion and Advaita Vedanta**

Arvind Sharma

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. viii + 232 p.

Arvind Sharma (McGill University) has illumined some very important problems in the philosophy of religion and cross-cultural study. To this day, the religious issues being discussed, both East and West, still exist in "solitude." Westerners are familiar with the discipline known as "philosophy of religion"; John Hick's book, *The Philosophy of Religion*, is one of the best representatives of the current state of that discipline. But Eastern thought in general and Advaita Vedanta in particular are still virtually a "voice in the wilderness" waiting to be heard. By focussing on issues raised by Hick, Sharma has grounded the discussion along representative lines and has admirably demonstrated the similarities and differences between two (seemingly) very different traditions.