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Office of Jewish Studies, Drew University, Madison, NJ 07940
Peter Ochs, Editor
Paula Massa, System Manager
Bitnet Address: POCHS@DREW. DREW. EDU; Telephone: (201)408-3222

Dear Bitnetwork Members,

Yes, it's been unsatisfyingly long since our last issue. Meanwhile, several new members have joined us (we're now over seventy) and a pile of material from and for you has piled up. Nonetheless, it may still be over a month before this editor returns from sabbatical enough to issue another full issue to you. Instead, and for now, here are announcements about postmodern Jewish philosophic events at the next annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion. As you may know, the meeting takes place at the Sheraton Washington Hotel, Washington, D.C., this week: November 20-23, 1993. Aspects of ALL seven of the Study of Judaism sessions will be of interest to Bitnetwork members; some sessions by BITNETWORK members will be explicitly on the subject of postmodern Jewish philosophy:

- A39: Jewish Memory (Shabbat 3:45-6:15pm): including postmodern Jewish philosophic studies by O. Stier, R. Gibbs and B. Zelechow.
- A66: Jewish or Christian Approaches to Textuality, Interpretation and Suffering (Sunday 9-11:30 am): including postmodern Jewish philosophic studies by R. Cohen and P. Ochs.

- A93: aspects of The Holocaust in Historical Context (Sunday 1-:3:30 pm)
- aspects of A120: Loss and Absence in the Jewish Tradition (Sunday 3:45-5:45pm)
- A168 Language and God (Monday 1:00-3:30pm): including pertinent hermeneutical reflections by E. Wolfson and Y. Greenberg.
- aspects of A193: Their Powers Revealed: Women in Recent Jewish History
- aspects of A216: Feminist Methodology and Lived Experience

Finally, the BITNETWORK will hold its third annual meeting at the AAR:

AM 127 POSTMOERN JEWISH PHILOSOPHY NETWORK:

9:30-11pm Sunday in OS-Council

The discussion topic will be:

“The Semiotics of Money: Reflections on B. Talmud Perek Hazahav” by Robert Gibbs and Peter Ochs.

Following the discussion, we’ll hold a business meeting to discuss new projects in the Bitnetwork.

As for the discussion itself, we hope you’ll have time to take a look at BT Baba Metsia 44b before you come and, if possible, read through the work-in-progress that is appended to this newsletter. If the assembled group has time to read the paper, we’ll be able to get more quickly to the discussion on what Talmud study may (or may not) have to do with postmodern Jewish philosophy!

We look forward to seeing you at the AAR. And we look forward to hearing from you by BITNET or INTERNET: please continue to send in material, letters and comments. They’ll appear soon in the next issue!

Gold and Silver: Philosophical Talmud

Robert Gibbs and Peter Ochs

AAR Presentation for 21 November 1993

For some postmodern philosophers, there are only two hermeneutic options. One is a strictly foundationalist hermeneutic that reduces phenomena to their a priori forms as defined by some unity of apperception or other. The other alternative is a strictly suspicious hermeneutic that despairs of offering any general guidelines for domesticating the disclosures of experience. We believe that a specifically Jewish postmodern inquiry offers a third option: studying how the elemental texts of a given community of interpreters implicate that community in certain modes of conduct: that is, how the texts command. We understand one of the main tasks of Jewish postmodern philosophic inquiry to be diagramming and evaluating how and what the texts command. To diagram is to construct a performative logic of the way in which the texts command some readers or community of readers to act. A performative logic means some kind of pragmatics, which means some kind of semiotics: that is, a model of how the texts, as commanding symbols, refer some interpreting community to some form of conduct. To evaluate such symbols is to examine what their consequences would be for given communities of interpreters.

One of the elemental texts of contemporary communities of rabbinic Jews remains the Talmud. Our task here is to illustrate postmodern Jewish philosophic inquiry by diagramming and evaluating how one Talmudic text might command a community of postmodern rabbinic Jews to act. Applied to the practices of such a Jewish community, a postmodern semiotic becomes a specifically Jewish postmodern semiotic, which means it exhibits certain features that might not always be evident in other forms of postmodern study. These features are best displayed only in the performance, but we'll offer a few remarks now about what you might anticipate. For starters, the semiotic is performative, which means it does something. One thing it does is to stimulate dialogue: if the Talmud classically commands a dialogic way of studying it (the *chevruta*), it also commands a dialogic way of diagramming its semiotic. To prove the point, here you have the two of us presenting this report. Of course, not

only this report, but also our study has been dialogic: the text becomes diagrammed through the way it stimulates us to argue about what it is arguing. As you will see, we have been stimulated to engage in several distinguishable levels of argumentation. The first one classifies the kinds of argument that are presented in the text and redescribes those arguments as ways of classifying the issues under consideration. Our second level of argumentation identifies what the Talmud arguments are about, or their domains of reference, and redescribes this arguments as claims about certain aspects of the world. Our third level identifies the different rules of inference with respect to which the Talmud makes these claims and redescribes the Talmudic arguments as performative demonstrations of these rules. Our fourth level redescribes these different rules as prototypes of three different forms of contemporary postmodern inquiry: syntactics, semantics and pragmatics.

As you will have noted, our approach does not fall into any of the categories of traditional Talmudic scholarship. While we do not believe the text can be separated from practical concerns, we do not study in the manner of traditional poskim (legal decisors) nor in the manner of the contemporary yeshivot. While our study of the text's semiotics is and would be enriched by philological and historical-critical research, our's is not an historical or literary-critical study. We do have several precedents in recent publications called philosophical: such as Jacob Neusner's, Louis Jacobs', and Emanuel Levinas'. Levinas' talmudic studies are, however, limited by his audience, since he delivers the reading popularly and does not engage in an halakhic analysis, nor one that explores logical complexity in the text. Jacobs is closer to that sort of rigor, but his interpretations do not attend to several of the metaphysical and ethical dimensions in the text. Finally, while Neusner explores several dimensions of logical complexity in the texts, he may not reflect self-consciously on the philosophic concerns he has applied to the text and then objectified in his reading of it. Such an approach may delimit multiple possibilities of textual meaning.

Among the philosophic topics to which our interest is drawn, the first topic is the logic of disagreement. Our concern is with credible multiple views on a given issue or principle. The goal is not simply to find out which one is true, but rather to accept multiplicity as intrinsic and understand the kinds of reasoning that help negotiate inextirpable disagreement. The love of arguments is not merely a forensic issue in talmud, but opens into a more general issues of reasoning and coordination of disagreeing views. The example we provide for this paper is one exercise in such a logic.

A second topic of conversation with the talmudic text is semiotics, or a theory of signs. The Sages reflect with great sophistication on how words signify, and indeed locate the question of written words in the contexts of all manners of inscription. Their concerns are both material, (what sort of ink, what sort of stone, what sort of engraving), but also about the nature of the signified, especially when referring to idolatry and the naming of God. They are, for us, a marvelous resource for examining how signs work.

A third topic in our study is the ethical dimension of communication. Our discussion of how signs work appears in the context of questions about oppression and business deals. Transactions or exchanges of goods are made a model for linguistic communication, and in the process both receive a greater depth: language becomes intrinsically a transaction, a performance based on trust between two parties, and business deals are linked to both interpersonal ethics and ultimately also to a divine economy (temple exchanges).

A fourth topic for philosophical speculation is the place of pragmatics in legal theory. In some ways, the talmud itself is an essay in jurisprudence—a course of education on how laws work, are decided, on what values are relevant to law, and so on. In critical legal theory (the new, postmodern kid on the legal-theory block), there is concern for many of the issues addressed somewhat obliquely in the talmud. Moreover, a key question is

the non-generalizable nature of legal reasoning: that specificity is inherent in jurisprudential matters. How specificity and indexicality fit with legal reasoning is one of the topics that the talmud revels in and offers a substantial contribution to the philosophical conversation.

Fifth, and last for this introduction, the Talmud assumes multiple readings and indeed, multiple readers. The socialization of the text in study pairs or even schools, carries into practice many of the claims about the sociality of texts and the plurality of interpretations. The creation of a textual form that supports multiple readers is striking to us. Moreover, the dynamics of reading together, of arguing through the text with the need to take turns, playing the r_les of the various sages and thus displacing our own positions for those of others, all lead to insights into a practice which plays off our cognitive subjectivity, and similarly the autonomy of our own thinking and acting. The folding in of these textual practices into the reflective activities seems closest to the task of postmodern Jewish philosophy.

The Context for the Argument

Our text is from the fourth chapter of Baba Metsia. The general topic is the closure of sales, but the specific question is the interchangeability of two currencies: gold and silver. From the mishnah's viewpoint, gold has intrinsic value and so can close a sale as merchandise, but silver is only money. The mishnah is eager to establish some 'real' things to which money can be referred for its value, and so 'devalues' silver. The gemarah does not begin with our text, but by opening up the alternate view: not that silver is merchandise and real and gold is only money. But rather that the two are interchangeable. The gemarah pushes as hard as it can, again and again, to argue against the elevation of gold into merchandise. What we see, instead, is the question of the relativity of designation: is gold money in general, but merchandise in relation to silver? Or can money ever become merely merchandise?

We read this discussion of money and merchandise as the general question about signs and objects and thus as the question of translation from one sign to another sign. The general thrust of the gemarah then becomes the acceptance of signs to refer 'merely' to other signs and no longer to fixed objective referents. The play of signs, becomes the exchange of coins. But our real concern with the text before you is how those questions can be played out in a formal logic of disagreement. The central disagreement between Beth Shammai and Beth Hillel is subjected to three different pairs of interpretations. Each pair is played out, in an almost formulaic way. The point being that even the disagreement requires an interpretative disagreement in order to be clarified. The problem is that the pair who interpret the first argument (Resh Lakish and Johanan) are reported by later sages to have had three different pairs of approaches to the original disagreement. Moreover, the editor has brought these three pairs into formulaic agreement and arranged them with a lesson in mind. Thus we receive a logic lesson in three stages, leading to deeper understanding of the question about coins (as signs).

Outline of the Central Argument

As we read the text, our Mishnah introduces an inquiry into the relativity of value and thus, as we interpret it, of meaning. The concrete question is the economics of exchanging second tithe produce for coins and coins (as money) for other coins. For the Mishnah, the topic raises the spectre of market value: is the variable market value of money to replace the absolute standards of the Temple cult? Is market value, furthermore, a symbol of the merely conventional meaning of signs; and is that conventionality a symbol of the relativity of meaning after the chorban habayit? Possessing meaning only by convention, are not signs unreliable bearers of Torah? Are they not irremediably subject to arbitrary use and to deceptive and thus oppressive use? Are there no longer any reliably absolute standards of economic or moral meaning? Through the sixth mishnah of chapter four, the mishnaic text appears to draw an as yet sharp distinction between realms of divine and human value: the absolute standards of Temple service, symbolized by the absolute economic value

of tangible things, and the unreliable standards of human discourse, symbolized by the relative values of money and signs. In 4.7-8, however, explicit discussion of the Temple service introduces the possibility of a more subtle trichotomy among money (as simple sign), things (as simple objects) and, now, action or performance, symbolized by Temple service. The Temple transforms things into elements in relation with the divine, as displayed in the Temple's divine economy. Then again, there is no Temple. The Mishnah's solution to the problem of meaning remains as yet an unrealized one. The trichotomy of money, thing and performance remains an ideal trichotomy that stands, dichotomously, over-against the actuality of a fallen Temple and of a fallen system of human discourse the performance of which may lead to deception as much as to meaningful relations.

As we read it, the Gemara offers a more hopeful depiction of this performance, at least when it is guided by the rules of Torah, at least, that is, when those rules are reinterpreted by the Tannaim and, then again, by the Amoraim. We focus on one section of the Gemara in which this hopeful depiction takes the form of a lesson in non-dichotomous logic. The subject is the Mishnah's discussion of the economics of exchanging second tithe produce for coins and, in particular, gold coins for silver coins, or vice-versa. More precisely, the issue is a disagreement between Rabbi Yohanan and Resh Lakish: three different versions of their differing interpretations of that over which Bet Shammai say "one may not exchange sela'im, for gold dinarim" and Bet Hillel permit. Our interest is drawn to the Gemara's bringing three different versions of this disagreement. Why three? What do the three teach differently? Our study itself has four levels (four levels of three versions of two arguments over the meaning of one two-line argument). We begin with the topic itself of exchanging coin for coin and move toward a study of how, for the Gemara, produce is exchanged for money, things are exchanged for meanings, objects for symbols, and meaningful performances (of interpretation and of other meritorious behavior) for meaningful texts for meaningful things. Ultimately, we surmise, reliable methods of discourse

and interpretation are exchanged for the old standard of absolute standards standing over-against mere things or merely relative uses.

The study begins with a Reading of the Central Argument. We will display this reading in outline form, hoping you will match each of our divisions of the argument to the appropriate verses of the text from BM 44b. In case you find it convenient to follow the argument in Adin Steinsalz's English translation, we have keyed each topic in the following outline to the corresponding line of the Gemara in that edition. (Thus the "First Version" begins on Steinsalz p.13 Line 8–13.8).

44b: The Argument (13.5)

Bet Shammai say: silver sela'im may not be exchanged for gold dinarim.

Bet Hillel say: it is permitted.

I FIRST VERSION OF THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT (13.8)

(The symbol Y will refer to R Yohanan; R= Resh Lakish.)

YS=Bet Shammai's position according to Y; etc. YS1 means the first version of this (with two more to come).

YSH= Both Shammai and Hillel agree, according to Y, that...

Y's interpretation concerns the status of selaim. He says that S argue that NO silver selaim can be exchanged for gold dinarim while H argue that, YES, they can. The resultant positions are:

YS1 (for whom silver is money): PRODUCE may not be exchanged for (silver) MONEY and then the money for GOLD. (13.10)

YH1 (for whom gold is money): YES produce may be exchanged for silver and then for gold.(14.1)

YSH1 and both permit produce to be exchanged for gold.(14.3) R's position concerns the exchange of produce for gold: that gold is always produce and doesn't change. The resultant positions are:

RS1 (for whom gold is always produce): produce may not be exchanged for gold. (15.5)

RH1 (for whom gold is always money): YES, produce may be exchanged for gold (15.5)

II SECOND VERSION OF THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT (20.5)

Y's second interpretation concerns the differing status of first money and second money in the exchange of second tithe produce for coins. Y2 assumes that silver selaim may not be exchanged for gold. The resultant positions are:

YS2 (for whom the silver is 1st money): 1st money may not be exchanged for other (2nd) money ; therefore, NO produce may be exchanged for silver and then silver for gold (20.8)

YH2 (for whom 2nd money may be exchanged) :YES, produce may be exchanged for silver money and then for gold. (21.1)

YSH2... :YES second-tithe produce may be exchanged for gold (since it can be first money) (21.3)'s second interpretation also concerns the the differing status of first money and second money in the exchange of second tithe produce for coins. But R2 argues that the exchange of produce for gold is also disputed. The resultant positions are:

RS2 (for whom produce cannot be exchanged for gold): produce may not be exchanged for silver money and then for gold (21.5)

RH2 (for whom gold is always money and for whom, YES, produce may be exchanged for gold): YES, produce may be exchanged for silver and then for gold...(21.5)

III THIRD VERSION OF THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT (24.1)

Y's third interpretation concerns whether or not delay is a reason for disallowing exchanges of silver for gold. The resulting positions:

YS3 The Torah allows exchanges of silver and gold, but out of concern for delay, the rabbis say: silver money may not be exchanged for gold. (24.3)

YH3 The Torah allows exchanges of silver and gold, and there is no rabbinic concern for delay:. YES, silver money may be exchanged for gold. (24.5)

YSH3 YES produce may be exchanged for gold. (24.7)

R's third interpretation concerns whether or not delay is a reason for disallowing exchanges of produce for gold. The resultant positions are:

RS3: NO produce may be exchanged for gold. (24.9)

RH3 ...: YES, produce may be exchanged for gold. (24.9)

Our First Level Observations: On Classifications

Our first level stays with the most concrete level of the three versions of the argument. The progression of the versions examines the different elements being argued about: that is, each construes the element of the dispute by referring to a different set of classes. The question in each version is, Into which class do we put gold and silver? The question between the versions is, Which kind of classes are under dispute? The task of exploring classification as applied to different kinds of classes reflects the discrepancies between different fields of discourse and raises the question of communication between different systems or different language games.

The First Version classifies the essential elements as if they were directly observable entities, that is, “things” in Nature. Within this version, different positions displayed differing tolerances for relativity or, that is, for polysemic vs simple definitions:

YS1: displays more absolutism or simplicity in definition;

YH1, YSH1: displays some relativity (as in the Mishnah);

RS1, RH1: simple absolutes;

The Second Version classifies the elements as elements of a system of Money. The argument is seen in terms of the status of money as ‘first’ or ‘second’ money, and the different positions are linked to questions of different language systems:

YS2: privileges an original language (and the textual repetitions are referred back to that language);

YH2, YSH2: privilege a deictic reading of Torah as text;

RS2, RH2: privilege Torah as law.

The Third Version classifies the elements as elements of a Textual system of Rabbinic Law. Here, all the positions display the influence of rabbinic law over the Torah text as well as over Nature.

Otherwise put, the interpretations of the positions of R. Yohanan and Resh Lakish are based on three different ways of classifying the issue, applied to the constants of S (no silver for gold) and H (yes silver for gold):

FIRST VERSION: The issue is relativity of value in nature (Naive Realism). Y, as interpreter, and H, as subject, attend to the RELATIVITY OF SILVER'S STATUS, as opposed to the absoluteness or simplicity of the position of S and the interpretation of R: the latter attending to the absoluteness of the status of gold.

SECOND VERSION: The issue is the significance of a Biblical (thus Textual) law about first or second money (Biblical literalism).

Y offers a literal reading of the indexicality (literal deixis) of silver. Thus: S refers to "THIS silver," while, for H, the text indicates (ostensively) that silver is money in general.

R offers absolute or simple definitions once again, reducing all issues to one point: THIS silver (referred to indexically) vs THIS gold.

THIRD VERSION: The issue is the impact of a Rabbinic and thus Hermeneutical or Interpretive law about delay in the use of first or second money (a Rabbinic hermeneutical revisionism).

Y examines whether or not the rabbinic law will be applied to a particular case: S says one must be concerned about delay; H says one need not. Here, R shares the concern, but applies only one interpretive principle to two different empirical (literal) cases.

Second Level Observations: On Domains of Reference

Our second level concerns three different domains of meaning and of value in the three versions. We look at the arguments as situating the question in realms where meaning is constituted differently, reflecting different authorities for meaning. The contrasts of the three versions, therefore, reflect upon the question of plurality of systems of meaning and value.

For Version #1, money and produce are elements of a natural world that is informed by certain natural or, in that sense, absolute standards of economic value. Disagreements about the absolute standards produce dichotomous legal alternatives.

For Version #2, they are elements of a social world that is informed by the societally authorized standards of the Temple cult, including Temple-based, absolute standards of economic value. Disagreements about the absolute standards produce dichotomous legal alternatives.

For Version #3, they are elements of a textual world that is informed by hermeneutical standards for interpreting discussions of economic law. Disagreements about these standards tend to produce trichotomous legal alternatives.

At this level we see that a simple opposition of natural vs. social sources of meaning and value will still not resolve the tendency to see only absolute value and its opposite. The switch to a level of interpretation, where texts require interpretation in order to bear their meanings allows for a richer field of meanings and values.

Third Level Observations: On Modes of Logical Inquiry

Our third level moves from this sequence of sources of meaning and value to the logic required in exploring these arguments. The versions will represent a ladder of complexity, but the basic structure of the argument is consistent: as can be seen even from the formulae of the text itself. The arguments of Y vs R teaches the difference between a 3-valued logic (or pragmatics) and a 2-valued logic (or semantics). Y displays the former; R displays the latter. Therefore, if the issue is to be interpreted according to R, then the two sides disagree ON PRINCIPLE: the argument is governed by the law of excluded middle. But if the issue is to be interpreted according to Y, then the two sides disagree about the PRESUPPOSITIONAL CONTEXT with respect to which the issue is to be decided; in this case, the two sides do not represent simple contraries.

As a lesson in the presuppositions that may inform a logic, the three versions of the argument display three levels of argumentation, each one informed by interpretive presuppositions of increasing semiotic complexity. For Version #1, the argument is about the economic character of the THINGS at issue (money or produce). In other words, version #1 defines scriptural law according to its referentiality, or the way it indicates something about some objects in the world. According to Y and R, Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel assess these objects differently. For Version #2, the argument is about the way these objects are signified in the Torah law. It is therefore about scriptural law as a collection of SIGNS of certain meanings or attributes or purposes. This version reads the scriptural law of redemption, for example, as a collection of signs about God, holiness, and place. According to Y and R, Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel interpret the meanings of these signs differently. For Version #3, the argument is about rules for interpreting the scriptural texts that signify this or that law. According to this version, rabbinic legal traditions define rules for interpreting the meaning of scriptural law. According to Y and R, Bet Shammai and Bet Hillel argue for different legal traditions of interpretation.

Fourth Level Observations: Anticipations of Postmodern Logical Inquiry

Finally, in the context of a postmodern philosophical inquiry, we can reread the three versions as anticipations, or types, of three moments, as well as three great stages, in the development of a logic of signs, or semiotics. The possibility for postmodern semiotics would be established elsewhere, but here the different ways that signs relate is easily enough on display. That is, we can analyse relations between signs, relations between signs and referents, and finally relations between signs and interpreters. These different modes of semiotic analysis are required in postmodern thinking precisely because the variation is needed by the process of signification. This talmudic paradigm puts each mode into play.

Since it distinguishes arguments only with respect to the objects they refer to, Version #1 offers lessons in precritical sign theory, or a theory for which signs are simply identified with their referents or objects: silver or gold either is money or is produce, or it is not. Since no distinctions are drawn here between objects and the signs that signify them, the logic that informs this theory is non-relative that is, it does not take relations of any kind into consideration.

Since it distinguishes arguments with respect to the ways in which they refer to their objects, Version #2 offers lessons in critical or modern sign theory. This theory is roughly synonymous with semantics, or the logic that relates signs to their potential objects or referents (such as coins that signify first money vs second money). This logic draws dyadic distinctions: that is, between signs and objects.

Since it distinguishes arguments with respect to rules for interpreting relations between signs and objects, Version #3 offers lessons in post-critical or postmodern sign theory. This theory is roughly synonymous with pragmatics, or the logic that relates signs to the interpretants (or interpretive contexts) with respect to which they signify certain objects (such as coins that signify first or second money with respect to the Torah laws of tithes). This logic draws triadic distinctions: that is, among signs, objects, and interpretants.

A note on 45B:

Semiotic innovation in the Discussion of Monetary Exchanges

Exhibiting subtleties of semiotic analysis that are not exhibited in the Mishnah, The Gemara that follows our Central Argument's three versions gives additional evidence of the logical interests of this chapter. We learn here that coins can be used as produce or non-money, to the extent that they are indices of certain unique properties rather than symbols of certain general values. Differences between the positions of Rav and Levi reinforce our sense that the Gemara is exploring differences between mono-semic (or "substantialist") and polysemic (or semiotic and

pragmatic) conceptions of meaning: in this case, between Levi's assumption that money is money (and thus signs are signs and objects are objects) and Rav's belief that differences between money and produce, or sign and object, may be relative to context. Rav Papa introduces a reason for Levi's view: coins are coins strictly by convention, and conventional meaning is strictly relative. As indicated at the outset, we believe our Mishnah is unable to free itself fully from this view, while the Gemara introduces a semiotically more adventuresome debate.

Conclusions

Through its four levels of interpretation, this postmodern inquiry diagrams BM 44b as an activity of classification, reference, argument, and, finally, of teaching logic. The original problem is one of coins, specifically in the context of exchanging coins: Which one counts as currency, which as produce? But, for our reading, this disagreement points out the central question about coins: how does money bear value? The question of the value of money itself is a key issue in the theory of signs in general: for, while meaning can be located in arguments about signs, the question of justice is played out most of all in an economic realm. It is not by chance that a text which is so well suited to a postmodern semiotic focuses on the various sign systems (coinages) of economic exchange. For rabbinic semiotics, the issues of justice are never merely a consequence, but rather animate the examination of all meaning, illuminating, in particular, the importance of the varieties of modes of interpretation.

To study this text, then, becomes a way of performing a series of different modes of interpretation—in which we can never eclipse the economic dimension of signification. This talmudic passage teaches its readers to distinguish between and to perform three different forms of logical inquiry. As defined in our fourth, or contemporizing level of observation, these three forms anticipate three stages in the development of semiotic inquiry corresponding, respectively, to an unreflective process of signification, to a critically reflective distinction between signs and their

objects, and to a postcritical reflection on relations among signs, their objects and their modes of interpretation. For critical or modern reflection, arguments may be distinguished effectively with respect to their different claims that is, the different meanings they assign to given signs. For postcritical or postmodern reflection, however, such arguments may be distinguished effectively only with respect to certain rules or traditions of assigning meanings to signs: if we can't identify the different rules or traditions that inform different arguments, then we can't make sense of, let alone resolve, differences among those arguments. These traditions of interpretation themselves revolve around different understandings of the justification of authority and reflect the practical and economic significance of different ways of interpreting a conflict about money. For postcritical reflection, the stakes are therefore pragmatic in the concrete sense of pragmatism, even as the analysis moves into more complex theoretical semiotic issues. In the multiplication of arguments, versions, levels and so on, we find the text of BM 44b offering a lesson in pragmatics and in postmodern logic, a lesson bound up with theory of signs as well as with coins of gold and silver.