

Difference and Similarity

A Review of Daniel Boyarin's *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* and *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*

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I first became “acquainted” with Boyarin when I was assigned his 1994 monograph, *A Radical Jew*, in a graduate course on Galatians in the mid-1990s. The book has had a long and lasting influence on my scholarship and even played a role in my decision to continue toward a doctoral degree. Boyarin’s style is bold, energetic, and daring; he plunges into issues that get at the heart of what is for many modern Jews and Christians central to who they are and to how they differ from each other. In *A Radical Jew*, Boyarin argues that Paul has “set the agenda for issues regarding gender and ethnicity for both Jews and Christians until this day.”¹ In his subsequent 2004 work, *Border Lines*, he again takes on a central issue for Jews and Christians. In that work he engages the issue of the logos—a second authoritative divine being alongside god—and comments that both ancient and modern authorities assess logos belief as “a virtual touchstone of the theological difference of Christianity from Judaism.”² By pulling from an array of writings from various cultures and philosophies—as well as on multiple interpretive methods³—he cleverly draws his readers into new modes of thought. Most of all, Boyarin is provocative, so much so that, whether one agrees or disagrees, he forces engagement.

In his 1994 monograph *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity*—influenced by F. C. Baur and James D. G. Dunn, among others—Boyarin adopts a universalist approach and argues that Paul was a radical reformer of Judaism who sought to erase the distinctive marks that set Jews apart from others. In *Border Lines*, he takes up the question of how and why a border was erected between Judaism and Christianity. His focus in this later work is on the parallel discursive practices of each group. He observes phenomenological

1. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 4 (italics are original).

2. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 38.

3. In *A Radical Jew*, Boyarin develops a “cultural reading” of Paul. That is, he takes into consideration other cultures’ readings of Paul as well as the politicized readings that are the outgrowth of people subjected to colonialist or racist practices. As a rabbinic Jew, his own cultural and political location informs his interpretations. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 40.

differences—unique textual products—between the two cultures only around the sixth century.⁴ In comparing his 1994 work to his later 2004 monograph, the notion of difference typifies the former, while similarity permeates the latter. I use the categories of difference and similarity to organize my review, comparison, and critique of his two works.

Paul Triggers Difference

A Radical Jew

In *A Radical Jew*, Boyarin argues that Paul was an important Jewish thinker of his time and a Jewish “cultural critic.”⁵ Paul recognized in his contemporary Judaism a tension between a “narrow ethnocentrism and universalist monotheism.”⁶ The ethnocentrism—also understood as Jewish particularism—especially troubled Paul, as it “implicitly and explicitly created hierarchies between nations, genders, [and] social classes.”⁷ As Boyarin puts it, Paul’s “genius”⁸ was to replace the embodied signs of Judaism—circumcision, kashruth, Sabbath observances, the Torah itself, and even the embodied sign “Israel,”⁹ signs that mark Jews as Jews¹⁰—with spiritual signifiers.¹¹ Paul denied the literality of language and ritual and affirmed instead spiritual signifiers, such as the universal Law of Christ, love, and faith.¹² Boyarin comments, “What is new in Paul is not the notion that one cannot be justified by acquiring merits [as the traditional reading of Paul would have it] but the notion that faith is the spiritual signified of which covenantal nomism [or Torah adherence] is the material signifier, and that in Christ the signified has completely replaced the signifier.”¹³

Paul comes to this line of reasoning through his participation in the thought-world of “eclectic Middle Platonism,” found among Greek-speaking Jews of the first century.¹⁴ Due to this influence, Paul assessed a difference between outer material signs—the body, religious practices, and language itself—and their

4. Boyarin remarks that it is the form of textuality that in the end marks the difference between Jewish and Christian orthodoxies. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 199–200.

5. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 2, 12, 52–56, 106, passim.

6. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 52.

7. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 52.

8. This is a word Boyarin often employs to characterize Paul. See Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 38, 85, 231, passim. At one point Boyarin notes, “It was Paul’s genius to transcend ‘Israel in the flesh’” (p. 231).

9. “Paul, no less than Philo, sought to overcome that embodiment of the Jewish sign system.” Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 22.

10. This is, of course, Dunn’s evaluation of Paul. Boyarin cites from James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 194.

11. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 25, 54, 85, 94, 96, 120, passim.

12. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 132, cf. 120.

13. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 120.

14. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 14.

inner representations, and he subordinated the former (the body) to the latter (the spirit). This hierarchical dualism between body and spirit—the body's inner and true significance—is matched in his hermeneutical practices, especially in his use of allegory.¹⁵ *Allegoresis*, Boyarin remarks, is a mode of interpretation “founded on a binary opposition [dualism] in which the meaning as a disembodied substance exists prior to its incarnation in language—that is, . . . a dualistic system in which spirit precedes and is primary over body.”¹⁶ With allegory, referents (signifiers) point to reality that is beyond and superior to the referents themselves. Moreover, Paul's often cited binary opposition between “flesh” (*sarx*) and “spirit” (*pneuma*) is evidence of Pythagorean thought,¹⁷ another form of eclectic Middle Platonism. It is especially in his letter to the Galatians, in which one finds a constellation of predominantly Hellenistic hermeneutics¹⁸ and discursive practices, where one sees ample evidence of these influences.

Paul's hierarchical dualism is intimately tied to his valorization of Oneness. Boyarin argues that Paul “was motivated by a Hellenistic desire for the One, which among other things produced an ideal of a universal human essence, beyond difference and hierarchy.”¹⁹ Evidence of this strong belief is found especially in Gal 3:28: “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (NRSV).” Indeed, Gal 3:28 is Boyarin's starting point and “hermeneutical key”²⁰ to Paul's thought. Here, but also elsewhere, Paul erases difference, especially ethnic and gender difference.²¹ The embodied Jew and the embodied woman become subordinated to one human essence. It is the erasure of difference, the erasure of particularity, that brings about the significant cultural shift, “the difference.”²² Paul's radical message of the eradication of human difference²³ is one that continues to reverberate today.

15. Boyarin remarks, “The fundamental hermeneutical stance which he [Paul] takes to the text is allegorical; that is, the language and even its apparent referents are understood as pointing to a reality beyond themselves” (Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 118).

16. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 14.

17. Chapter three of *A Radical Jew* is devoted to the opposition between the spirit and the flesh. See Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 57–85. Paul's various oppositions, such as body/soul, humans/God, works/faith, traditional teaching/revelation, etc., indicate the influence of Pythagorean thought and expression (pp. 30–31).

18. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 118, 228, *passim*. According to Boyarin, Paul can nevertheless still participate in Hebraic midrashic techniques.

19. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 7, 106, 181, *passim*. Boyarin remarks, “[W]hat drove Paul was a passionate desire for human unification, for the erasure of differences and hierarchies between human beings, and that he saw the Christian event, as he experienced it, as the vehicle for this transformation of humanity” (p. 106).

20. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 6, 22.

21. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 8. Galatians itself, on Boyarin's reading, is “entirely devoted to the theme of the new creation of God's one people, the new Israel through faith and through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ” (pp. 106–7).

22. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 25 (italics are my own).

23. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 107.

Surely Boyarin employs the adjective “genius” for Paul as tongue-in-cheek. I read his book then and now as a lament for an appreciation of Jewish particularity, for Jewish distinctiveness, indeed for Jewishness itself. It is difficult to see how, from the perspective of Boyarin, that Paul can be commended. Indeed, Boyarin claims that, while Paul’s writings are not the start of anti-Semitism, they are the origin of the “Jewish Question.”²⁴ The Jewish Question, however, defined as the “problem” of how to integrate Jews as Jews into the larger society²⁵ but which Boyarin would likely define as the “continuing significance of the Jewish people,”²⁶ is a problem and akin to anti-Semitism. For his interpretation of Paul, Boyarin relies upon the German theologian F. C. Baur (1790–1860). If Baur was not anti-Semitic, he surely was supersessionistic with regard to his understanding of Paul.²⁷ Baur claimed that Paul was strongly against Jewish exclusiveness.²⁸ According to him, Jews believed they had a “theocratic supremacy” (“*theokratische Primat der jüdischen Nation*”) and an absolute claim on God.²⁹ Baur also likely had first-hand experience of the Jewish Question.

In Boyarin’s reading, Paul valorizes faith over particularity, those material elements that define and mark the ancient Jew, Jewish rites, the Torah itself, and Israel according to the flesh.³⁰ As he remarks, the subordination of the particular or the body to the universal becomes for Paul “the actuality of a new religious formation which deprives Jewish ethnicity and concrete historical memory of value by replacing these embodied signs with spiritual signifiers.”³¹ He contrasts Paul’s allegorical method unfavorably to the midrashic hermeneutic of other Jews of his time and comments that, in distinction from Paul, midrash

24. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 156.

25. Bein, *The Jewish Question*, 19, 21. As Bein remarks, at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, when Jews left the Jewish districts and entered more fully into the surrounding economic, social, and political life, and demanded equal status with the other citizens, “people [began] to regard their existence as a problem requiring a solution.” At first these non-Jews spoke of toleration, but by 1842 the Jewish Question came to mean the *problem* of integrating Jews into the Christian society. In 1880 the Jewish Question intensified into the anti-Semitic movement (p. 20).

26. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 203.

27. Baur writes, “The apostle feels that in his conception of the person of Christ, he stands on a platform where he is infinitely above Judaism, where he has passed far beyond all that is merely relative, limited, and finite in the Jewish religion, and has risen to the absolute religion” (Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 2.126).

28. Baur remarks, “The main idea running through its entire extent [Romans] is the absolute nothingness of all claims founded on Jewish exclusiveness. The aim of the Apostle is to confute the Jewish exclusiveness so thoroughly and radically that he fairly stands in advance of the consciousness of the time” (Baur, *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ*, 1.356–57).

29. Baur, *Paulus*, 2.353.

30. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 120, cf. 132.

31. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 25.

makes concrete reality of language and history “absolutely primary.”³² In mid-rash there is no division (no duality) between the referent (language) and what it signifies. By this interpretation, Paul fails to honor his own tradition. Indeed, Boyarin’s views appear to be close to those of the nineteenth-century Jewish historian Henrich Graetz, who wrote, “[W]ithout Saul, Christianity would have no stability . . . he seemed created to establish what was new, and to give form and reality to that which seemed impossible and unreal.”³³ In Graetz’s estimation, Paul was a “destroyer of Judaism,”³⁴ not a Jewish genius.

The notion that Christianity is a universalistic religion is without a doubt well rooted in the modern Christian imagination.³⁵ Yet universalism is more a phenomenon of early nineteenth-century Europe³⁶ than it is of Paul. Indeed, it is Baur who is in large measure responsible for the universalist interpretation of Paul.³⁷

In contrast to Baur’s universalist, literalist, and anti-Jewish reading of Paul, Denise Buell and Carolyn Johnson Hodge have argued convincingly that early Christians like Paul made universalizing claims for strategic reasons. They employed universalist language to win over non-Jews, for self-legitimization purposes, and to compete with insiders for the superiority of their own version of Christianity.³⁸ Johnson Hodge, for example, argues that Paul does not value universal over ethnic religion but instead deploys “ethnic discourses” in order to negotiate the relationship between Jews and gentiles.³⁹ Arguing similarly, Denise Buell comments,

We need to approach Christianity not as an essence but as a contested site—one defined and claimed by competing groups and individuals—and Christian history not as an evolving totality but rather as a series of ongoing struggles, negotiations, alliances, and challenges.⁴⁰

Buell maintains that in order to gain adherents, these ancient authors presented an ideal form of religion with unified beliefs and practices.⁴¹ In making

32. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 118.

33. From Graetz, *History of the Jews from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* II, 149. As cited in Langton, “The Myth of the ‘Traditional View of Paul,’” 78.

34. Langton, “The Myth of the ‘Traditional View of Paul,’” 79.

35. Carolyn Johnson Hodge discusses how modern Christians who know that they are not Jews understand that Christianity transcends ethnic identities and then project that onto Paul. See Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 47–48.

36. Indeed, at the same time Europe was dealing with the Jewish Question.

37. On this, see Johnson Hodge, who credits nineteenth-century exegetes such as F. C. Baur with the universalist reading of Paul (Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 6).

38. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 2, 136, passim. See also her final chapter, pp. 138–65.

39. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 48, 127–28.

40. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 29.

41. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 140.

their universalist claims, these early Christian authors made use of “culturally available understandings of human difference.”⁴² That is, they grounded their hermeneutic in the language of *genos*, of race, ethnicity, and people.⁴³ According to Buell, “it is not feasible to continue to accept a definition of Christianity as a new kind of religion, detached from traditional social and political cultures and centered on belief.”⁴⁴

Furthermore, following on the scholarship on Paul since the late twentieth century, Johnson Hodge remarks that Paul in Galatians and elsewhere does not address Jews and gentiles alike, but instead only gentiles.⁴⁵ On this now common-for-many-scholars’ understanding of Paul’s audience,⁴⁶ Paul does not ask Jews to abandon their particular traditions and rites, but instead discourages only gentiles from adopting them. Finally, and again in the more recent scholarship, Paul was not attempting to resolve a tension between narrow ethnocentrism and universalist monotheism,⁴⁷ but instead negotiating how gentiles (his intended audience) could be incorporated into the god of Israel.

Early Jews and Early Christians as Twins⁴⁸

Border Lines

By contrast to *A Radical Jew*, in which Boyarin argues that Paul signals difference (difference in thought and in hermeneutical practices), in *Border Lines* he defers a real sense of difference between Judaism and Christianity until the sixth century.⁴⁹ Indeed, Boyarin begins this study by refusing to understand that

42. Buell, “Ethnicity and Religion in Mediterranean Antiquity and Beyond,” 2. According to Buell, ancient Christian authors employed “ethnic reasoning—modes of persuasion that may or may not include the use of a specific vocabulary of peoplehood” to “legitimize various forms of Christianness as the universal, most authentic manifestation of humanity.”

43. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 2.

44. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 156. Johnson Hodge comments, “The bifurcation of body and belief, ethnicity and religion, was foreign to first-century thinkers” (Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 48).

45. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs*, 9–11.

46. On the issue of Paul’s intended addressees, see especially Pamela Eisenbaum, who comments that it is extremely important to understand that negative statements Paul makes concerning the law can be “easily explained” when one realizes that he is addressing gentiles and not Jews (Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 216–17, cf. 61, 244, 248, *passim*). See also Stowers, *Rereading Romans*, 21–33).

47. See Eisenbaum, who argues that Jews were able to hold in tension the notion that god was over the entire universe (universal) and that god was at the same time the god of Israel (particular). Israel itself played the role of mediating between god and the nations (non-Jews) (Eisenbaum, *Paul Was Not a Christian*, 196–97).

48. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 5.

49. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 199–200, cf. 21.

there was a fully formed and separate Christianity⁵⁰ and Judaism⁵¹ until late antiquity. Judaism and Christianity come into being together, through ongoing contact with each other. The two engage in similar discursive practices. Even by the sixth century, when their textual products represent phenomenological differences between them, Boyarin resists a distinction between the two traditions with the inference that religion itself is a projection and not a “disembedded category.”⁵²

Boyarin employs wave theory—from the field of linguistics—to describe Jewish-Christian history. In the traditional or family-tree model for understanding the relationship between dialects, shared origins accounts for the similarities among them. By contrast, wave theory posits that similarities in dialects may come about through contact.⁵³ Wave theory assesses that dialects are not strictly bounded or separated but instead “shade one into the other.”⁵⁴ Applying the wave theory model from linguistics to group formation, Boyarin argues that, instead of a “pure” Jew or a “pure” Christian (essential origins), one finds instead hybridity—the shading of groups into each other—with no purity to be found. In the more traditional family tree model and as it is conceptualized in the “parting of the ways” perspective, Christianity breaks off from a “pure” Judaism. In wave theory, however, there is an absence of original Judaism and hence no “parting of the ways.” As Boyarin notes, there was an assortment of religious “dialects” throughout the Jewish world that eventually develop structure and become organized into “religions.”⁵⁵ *Border Lines* concerns itself with the ways in which the structures and organizations occur that eventually develop into the “religions” of Judaism and Christianity.

Heresiology, Boyarin comments, is key to the beginning of the organizational process of both cultures. Late second-century Rabbis and Christian authors, such as Justin and Irenaeus, engaged in heresiology,⁵⁶ defined as discursive practices employed to erect borders between themselves and others and to establish identity (orthodoxy). Heresiology brings about both orthodoxy and heresy, which come into being discursively and together.⁵⁷ The heresiological

50. The differentiation process occurs because “a serious problem of identity arose for Christians who were not prepared (for whatever reason) to think of themselves as Jews, as early as the second century, if not at the end of the first.” Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 16–17.

51. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 7.

52. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 27.

53. That is, by the “convergence of different dialects spoken in contiguous areas” (Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 18).

54. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 18.

55. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 19.

56. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 5, 55. They engage in this practice in “strikingly similar” ways (p. 5).

57. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 3. Quoting from Judith Lieu, Boyarin notes, “It is in opposition that Christianity gains its true identity, so all identity becomes articulated, perhaps for the first time, in face of ‘the other,’ as well as in the face of attempts by the ‘other’ to deny its existence” (p. 72).

project is important to Justin, as evidenced by the fact that for the first time with him one finds the Greek word *haireisis* to undergo a shift in meaning. No longer does *haireisis* mean “a party or sect marked by common ideas and aims,”⁵⁸ but instead “a group that propounds false doctrine.”⁵⁹ In other words, prior to Justin, one finds sects with differing ideas and practices but that do not break loose from a larger tradition. Then, with Justin one finds evidence that certain groups are considered to be outside of a larger and recognized tradition. With Justin too there is a rise in the significance of doctrines, another sign of emerging orthodoxy.

Similar heresiological activity occurs on the Jewish side, in the Mishna, a text of proximate date to Justin’s *Dialogue*. In this late second-century composition one finds for the first time the terms *min* and *minut* employed, like *haireisis*, to mean heresy. The change in the meaning of *min* suggests that the rabbinic authors of the Mishna, like Justin, no longer imagined themselves as a sect, but as the majority voice, as those who establish the larger tradition.⁶⁰ Like Justin, the Rabbis engaged in a similar discursive process, in the “parallel shaping”⁶¹ of themselves as orthodox and of others as heretical. Thus, authors representative of each group “exercised agency”⁶² to appropriate ideas and self-representations for their particular communities. Boyarin insists that the parallel shaping is not a matter of the influence of one group on another but instead of each group’s engagement in “dialogical relations between texts and traditions.”⁶³

Justin’s heresiological activity, Boyarin notes, very much turns on the notion of the Logos.⁶⁴ Indeed, Logos theology itself is central to Boyarin’s overall thesis and functions in *Border Lines* with a significance similar to the Universal One in *A Radical Jew*.⁶⁵ According to Boyarin’s reading, in his *Dialogue with Trypho* Justin makes the Logos the “major theological center” of Christianity.⁶⁶ Belief in the Logos determines who is and who is not Christian: Christians are those who believe in the Logos, Jews are those who do not, and Christians who do not believe in the Logos are deemed heretics.⁶⁷

58. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 3, 40.

59. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 3, 55.

60. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 55. As Boyarin remarks, *minim* arises out a challenge to identity, raised by Justin and others like him.

61. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 55.

62. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 66.

63. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 66. Boyarin writes, the “process of local variation of a common tradition is known by folklorists as ecotypification. Rabbinic and orthodox Christian heresologies are, thus, on my account, ecotypes of each other.”

64. “[F]or Justin belief in the Logos as a second divine person is . . . the very core of his religion” (Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 39).

65. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 38.

66. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 38.

67. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 39. In Boyarin’s reading, the *Dialogue* is aimed simultaneously in two directions: it attempts to distinguish/create gentile Christian identity, and it protects Justin from the charge of the heresy of ditheism (p. 38).

Justin, however, employs Logos theology to denote Christian uniqueness and difference between groups, where no such distinction otherwise existed. Pre-rabbinic Jews of Justin's time also acknowledged the Logos. Logos is central to Philo's theology;⁶⁸ "Logos is both a part of God and a separate being."⁶⁹ Philo envisioned the Logos as a mediator figure, "a personified demiurge."⁷⁰ In the Targums—pararabbinic Aramaic translations of the Bible—one finds the notion of the *Memra* ("word" and also "God"), best understood as a divine entity or mediator.⁷¹ For these synagogue Jews outside of rabbinic control, the *Memra* [had] a place above the angels as that agent of the Deity who sustains the course of nature and personifies the Law."⁷² The Babylonian Talmud (*Sanh.* 38b) provides additional evidence of an early belief in a second divine entity who functions like God, known as Metatron.⁷³ That both early Jews and early Christians embraced a Logos theology leads Boyarin to conclude that actual Christians and Jews would not have distinguished themselves over this issue.⁷⁴ It is only the heresiologists, such as Justin and the early Rabbis, who made of the Logos an issue over which to distinguish themselves from each other. Justin discursively denies the Jews the Logos, while the Rabbis turn the Logos into a heresy, and thus reject it for themselves.

Boyarin provocatively terms the discursive heresiological activity in which both groups engage, "crucifying the Logos."⁷⁵ While both groups participate in the "crucifixion," how they replace the Logos with some other authority differs. For the Rabbis, Torah comes to supersede the Logos. According to them, the Logos is only to be found within the Book and no place else. Alternatively, the Christians transfer the authoritative heavenly Logos to a Logos incarnate, to Jesus.⁷⁶ For the Rabbis, the Logos winds up in writing (in the Torah or the Book),

68. Boyarin quotes and agrees with the evaluation of David Winston, who comments that "Logos theology is the linchpin of Philo's religious thought" (Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 113, cf. 114–16).

69. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 114.

70. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 116.

71. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 117.

72. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 116. "Although, . . . official rabbinic theology sought to suppress all talk of the *Memra* or Logos by naming it the heresy of Two Powers in Heaven, before the Rabbis, contemporaneously with them, and even among them, there were a multitude of Jews, in both Palestine and the Diaspora, who held this version of monotheistic theology." In all of the Palestinian Targums, the word *Memra* comes to mean simply "God," and its usage is nearly parallel to that of the Logos (p. 119).

73. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 120–23.

74. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 125.

75. See Boyarin, *Border Lines*, especially chapters 2, 4–6.

76. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 129. On the Christian side, this move can be seen in the prologue of John's Gospel. "When the text announces in verse 14 that the 'Word became flesh,' this advent of the Logos is an iconic representation of the moment that the Christian narrative begins to diverge from the Jewish Koine and form its own nascent Christian kerygma, proclamation" (p. 105).

whereas for the Christians, the Logos ends up in the voice of a person.⁷⁷ For the Jews, “The supersession of the Logos by writing gives birth to rabbinic Judaism and its characteristic forms of textuality.”⁷⁸

By engaging in the activity of “crucifying” the Logos, each group disavows a part of itself.⁷⁹ Yet each group participates in this self-denying activity, because its stronger interest is to differentiate from each other, from its twin. Boyarin writes, “By naming the traditional Logos or Memra doctrine of God a heresy, indeed, *the* heresy, Two Powers in Heaven, the rabbinic theology expels it from the midst of Judaism, hailing that heresy at least implicitly as Christianity, at the same time that, in a virtual cultural conspiracy, the emerging Christian orthodoxy embraces the Logos theology and names its repudiation Judaism.”⁸⁰

There is, however, another so-called crucifixion of the Logos in which both groups participate. This second discursive exercise also takes place nearly in tandem in the fifth–sixth centuries. The writings of post-Nicene Christianity and the final redactions/layers of the Babylonian Talmud provide evidence of this second discursive event. Once again, while the discursive practices of both groups are similar, each group devises its own unique understanding of how the “crucifixion” should play out, that is, where its final authority should ultimately lie. On the Jewish side, authority winds up in *polynoia*, many-mindedness or multiple authorities,⁸¹ a move that only occurs in the latest layers of the Babylonian Talmud (fifth–sixth centuries). The earlier layers evince one authoritative voice of God, *homonoia*, envisioned as embodied in Torah. In the final redactions of the Talmud, however, the Oral Torah—the multivocal writings of the Rabbis—supersede the divine voices within Torah itself.⁸² In part, the Rabbis make possible this shift to a new understanding of the place of authority through the creation of the myth of Yavneh. These later Rabbis invent Yavneh as the ecumenical council that makes Oral Torah authoritative, with the result that the divine authority previously located in the Torah submits to their own authority. The hermeneutic of *polynoia* means that indeterminacy is the standard, rather than one truth (Logos)—which lies behind and outside the

77. The *Gospel of Truth*, considered Christian as it refers to an authoritative Jesus, disrupts this neat bifurcation of the Logos’s resting place. In the gospel, the Logos becomes identified with the Book, namely, the *Gospel of Truth*. For more on this, see Kreps, “The Passion of the Book: The *Gospel of Truth* as Valentinian Scriptural Practice,” 311–35. Kreps remarks that, in the *Gospel of Truth*, “The Son, the divine logos, is recited into the world as a book” (p. 319).

78. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 146.

79. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 131. The Jewish notion of Two Powers in Heaven is disavowed by the Rabbis, an activity that may be a response to Christianity (pp. 132–33, cf. 145–46).

80. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 145–46.

81. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 153, 162.

82. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 172.

text—considered determinative of meaning.⁸³ This is a crucial move, as it marks the phenomenological difference between Judaism and Christianity. As Boyarin notes, “the notion that God himself [sic] suffers a fall into language, and thus into linguistic indeterminacy, may be the most powerful and creative, perhaps even unique, theological notion of rabbinic Judaism. And this is a distinction that made a difference.”⁸⁴

On the Christian side, this second crucifixion also occurs in the late ancient/early medieval period and is evident in the writings of St. Augustine (fifth century) and St. Gregory (sixth century), authors of patristic orthodoxy. In contrast to the Rabbis, for these Christian authors, uniformity or *homonoia*, saying the same thing, is the standard.⁸⁵ Nicene Christianity rejects dialectic in favor of a “miraculously authorized monovocal truth.”⁸⁶ The Christian authors crucify the Logos by binding it to heaven, and the Logos behind the text becomes the authoritative voice. This shift to monovocality from an earlier multivocality comes about in the same discursive fashion employed by the sixth-century Rabbis, through the creation of a myth. Christian authors invent the legendary council of Nicaea, which, like Yavneh, was also a claim for the ultimate truth, not to be found in the Oral Torah of course, but instead in the apostolic teachings. Both myths authorize sixth-century orthodoxies.⁸⁷ Both groups crucify the Logos, but to different ends. While the Rabbis espouse multivocality, the Church Fathers submit to univocality. According to Boyarin, “[P]ost-Nicene orthodox Christianity bound the Logos to heaven (the full transcendentalizing of the Son), the late ancient Rabbis broke it (the tablets have been smashed, and the Torah is not in heaven).”⁸⁸ The textual products that result from these sixth-century discursive exercises are both forms of orthodoxy, and in both human actors lose the ability to discover truth through rational decision making and dialectic.⁸⁹ Boyarin writes,

The volubility of human voices that issued from the very different Babylonian rabbinic and (neo-) Nicene strategies of defanging disputation of its power to produce truth is conducive to significant contrasts in the modes of textuality within the two religious cultures and the two orthodoxies that emerged triumphant, each in its own (unequal) sphere, at the end of late antiquity.⁹⁰

83. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 191.

84. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 178.

85. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 178.

86. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 193. Boyarin claims that the origins of this understanding can be found as far back as Paul and be seen within the writings of Tertullian.

87. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 196.

88. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 200.

89. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 200.

90. Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 201.

Conclusion: Sparks of Discussion⁹¹

The beauty of these two works, indeed one might even say their genius, is not only in their sophistication but in Boyarin's ability to weave diverse material into a coherent whole. Both works are masterful. It seems to me, however, that there is a certain vulnerability with regard to his approach. In both of these works he begins with later manifestations—the Universal One and the Logos—and then looks for how these particular notions got their start. Authorial intent underlies his assumptions: Paul intended to subordinate the particular to the universal; Justin intended to deny the Logos to Jews. While I have no doubt that many modern Christians consider that Christianity is a universal religion, I doubt, as mentioned above, that Paul intended to create a universal entity. His motivation for doing so escapes me; if anything, Paul condescends to gentiles (see e.g. Gal 2:15). I wonder too how Paul could have been a Jewish cultural critic if, and as Boyarin argues in *Border Lines*, there was likely no unified Judaism at his time to which he could have been opposed.

And while I agree that the notion of a second divine being equal in authority to the one God (the Logos in the form of Christ) conceptually divides modern Jews and Christians, I am less convinced that Justin claimed the Logos for himself and denied it to Jews. Such an argument implies that Justin was somehow savvy to the centrality of Logos theology for contemporaneous Jews and even for later Christians. Justin, however, does not evince knowledge that Jews held a Logos theology. Indeed, he expends much literary and exegetical effort, devoting at least three-quarters of his lengthy *Dialogue*, to the attempt to persuade Trypho and his teachers—and likely himself too—that Jesus is the Logos/Christ. At the *Dialogue's* end (142), Trypho's refusal to embrace the Logos likely serves as additional evidence to Justin's internal audience that Jews are ignorant and hard hearted and that the Logos theology was still under development. Justin, however, *is* in the business of differentiating himself from Trypho-like Jews,⁹² and the Logos does function as one site of distinction. Buell comments that Justin employs the Logos to root Christian identity in the past and thereby justify its beliefs.⁹³ My point is that neither Paul nor Justin appear to be later-doctrine savvy⁹⁴ and operate instead in a type of con-

91. Borrowed from Boyarin's expression "Sparks of the Logos" in Part III of *Border Lines*.

92. On this, see Buell, *Why This New Race*, 95–115. Buell mentions Justin's Logos theology but largely with regard to his *Apologies*. The *logos spermatikos* is a seed of the divine logos resident in all humans (2 *Apol.* 8.1).

93. Buell, *Why This New Race*, 79, 115.

94. Much of the recent scholarship on Paul contends that he is less (if at all) focused on doctrine and more on particular situations of particular communities. Victor Furnish, e.g., remarks, "More recent studies of Christian origins have shown that it was quite mistaken to label Paul the founder of Christianity, as we know it" (Furnish, *The Moral Teachings of Paul*, 10). Furnish adds, "His [Paul's] aim in writing was to address the particular needs of specific Christian congregations, in specific locations, involved in specific situations, at specific times" (p. 15).

ceptual fog.⁹⁵ Seeds of what become normative are present in both Paul and Justin, but the forces bringing those later normative notions to fruition are less apparent during their time.

As indicated above, within these two works are notions of difference and similarity, with tensions around these notions both within and between the works. In *A Radical Jew*, the over-arching thesis is that Paul signals difference and marks the beginning of a divide between Judaism and Christianity. *Border Lines: A Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, already in its title anticipates a distinction between two religious groups. In that later work, for example, one finds an underlying emphasis on and indeed the movement toward distinctiveness: The Rabbis insist upon multivocality rather than the univocity adopted by later Christians. At the same time, *Border Lines* also argues that all along the way toward difference the two entities are twins, hence, similar. The dance, however, around difference and similarity is based on an assumption of unified entities, organized products that function as distinctive wholes. And while within *Border Lines* there is ongoing resistance to the notion of unified and distinctive entities, they nonetheless appear to be Boyarin's ending point, and in *A Radical Jew*, his starting point. These unified wholes, lurking in the background, fight against the complexity of the relationships of various groups, the fundamental hybridity that he also seeks to demonstrate and indeed argues is true of the situation on the ground.

95. The *Dialogue* has the reputation as being rambling. Robert Miller comments, "The dialogue is very long (almost as long as all four gospels combined), repetitious, poorly organized, and padded with numerous extended scriptural quotations" (Miller, *Helping Jesus Fulfill Prophecy*, 232).

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