Exploring the Hebrew Bible from a discourse analytical perspective: A case study on the polemics against other gods

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In my doctoral thesis, I investigate how biblical polemics against other gods developed. A number of texts in the Hebrew Bible denigrate both gods other than Yahweh and the people who worship them. I am interested in the formation of these texts and in their purpose. I do not think they have a purely literary function, and I wonder what might have been their function with regard to real life.

The polemical texts my study is based on show some common features. Previous studies classified Isa 40,19f.; 41,6f.; 44,9-20; 46,1f.5-8; Jer 10; Hab 2,18f.; Ps 115; Ps 135, Bel et Draco (Dan 14); Letter of Jeremiah (Bar 6); Wis 13-15; Jub 11-12 as "idol parodies"[1]. Because of their similarity in argument, expression and tone, these texts are intuitively perceived as related. Their thematical and linguistic characteristics set them apart from their immediate context.

It seems to me that this resemblance is not the result of mere literary dependence, as if all these texts were derived from one original text. Very often, the polemical texts are secondary additions to other texts, but they do not form a unified redactional layer.

On the one hand, these texts form a group that is clearly marked off, but on the other hand, it is difficult to name the defining features of that group: it is not a literary unit, and it is more than similarity of content.

For my study, I need a theoretical foundation which can explain the particular relationship of the polemical texts and which at the same time enables me to investigate the function of these texts.

Discourse analysis can meet this requirement: it provides a conceptual framework for the description and the analysis of these texts as a group, and it is concerned with the function and effects of texts. In this paper, I will argue that despite the differences between the source material used for conventional discourse analysis and the biblical texts, it is possible to use this approach for Hebrew Bible texts, and it is especially appropriate for my study on the polemical texts against other gods.

[1] Cf. von Rad 1970, 229-239 (chapter "Die Polemik gegen die Götterbilder"), Berlejung 1998, 318-411. Roth 1975 studies these texts as examples of the genre of idol parody. My own study is not focused on idols; I will also investigate if the polemical narratives in Jg 6; 1 Sam 5 and 1 K 18 are related to the texts above mentioned.

General introduction to discourse analysis

Based on the works of Michel Foucault, sociologists, linguists and historians have developed theories and methods of discourse analysis[2]. For my study I adopt the discourse theoretical approach developed by the sociologist Reiner Keller. I have chosen Keller's approach as a starting point, for my principal aim is not to develop new methods, but to apply a method that fits my research interest[3]. Keller provides a sound theoretical basis and detailed propositions for the implementation. In addition, I use some concepts to describe discourse structure that were coined by Siegfried Jäger[4]. Both authors agree that discourse analysis is essentially an interpretative process, and both developed methods for the application of discourse analysis on texts.

Before turning to discourse analysis as a method, I will briefly present the underlying discourse theory[5].

a) Discourse theory

By "discourse" I refer to a structured set of statements which produces and strengthens societal reality.

One possible approach to discourse theory is the observation that not everything can be said. What can be said at a certain place at a certain time is not just a matter of grammar or of existing words. There is an infinite number of grammatically possible utterances, but only a limited number of them is actually used and valid at a certain place and at a certain time. The set of statements[6] is limited and structured by certain rules, for example underlying deductive patterns or story lines. Utterances based on the same system of statements form a discourse.

Discourses are not mere linguistic conventions. The utterances produced according to the rules are valid communications, they can express truth and reality. (This is especially obvious in scientific discourse. To give a very plain example: a poem is nowadays not an acknowledged form of expressing new findings in natural sciences.) Mental concepts are

[2] In English, the term "discourse analysis" in most cases refers to an analysis of language use in a process of communication. This kind of analysis is not based on a discourse theory that follows Foucault. I will not discuss this approach, as it is not concerned with the relationship between texts and societal reality.

[3] Foucault does not provide an explicit, consistent theory and method of discourse analysis. Further theoretical grounding (such as provided by the sociology of knowledge) and analytical tools are therefore needed.

[4] I found Jäger's concepts of *discourse fragment, discourse strand, discursive entanglement* and *discourse plane* very useful. On his conceptualization of the structure of discourses see Jäger 2009, 159-168 (for a shorter version in English see Jäger 2006, 46-51).

[5] The following explanation of discourse theory is based on Jäger 2009 and Keller 2008. On this general level, similar statements can be found in many discourse theoretical works, although they might embed discourse theory in a different theoretical and/or disciplinary framework.

[6] "Statement" means the conceptual content on an analytical level, "utterance" is the actual linguistic entity or historical materialisation of a statement. This distinction was coined by Foucault, cf. Keller 2008, 235f.

shaped by discourses (that is to say, in a process of communication). These concepts also shape our perception of the sensible world. Discourses are thus the source of knowledge valid in a certain society and shape societal reality.

It is not possible to reach a more "real reality" behind all discourses.

Discourses do not merely influence our perception of reality in the sense that they provide interpretations of previously existing facts. They generate new realities and lead to the establishment of institutions. This is most visible in the democratic process of political debates, but it is true for all kinds of societal discourses. Discourses have creative power, they influence our actions and can thus entail the establishment of laws and institutions. For instance, an opposing discourse to the discourse on assisted suicide can lead to the foundation of hospices.

Discourses are produced by a community. A single person can neither produce a discourse nor determine the development of a discourse.

Furthermore, the individual subject is not autonomous. Every person is shaped by discourses established previously, which he or she has to join in order to enunciate something socially accepted as true.

Someone who writes a text will make use of the resources provided by the society he or she is living in, i.e. the specific knowledge and the system of statements. A text thus contains elements of societal discourses, and is at the same time a contribution to a societal discourse itself. It reproduces the statements of a discourse in an actual utterance and it may be instrumental in modifying the discourse. A text is thus a fragment of a super-individual discourse or, more frequently, consists of several discourse fragments.

b) Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is the study of discourse, usually of a certain discourse strand (= a thematically uniform discourse). Discourse analysis aims at the reconstruction of the rules, the structure and the progression of a discourse strand. Research questions may also include[7]:

- Which aspects of reality are shaped in a discourse strand, and how are they shaped?
- How is a discourse strand entangled with other discourse strands and what effects result from this entanglement?

Discourse strands can be analyzed synchronically (What can be said at a certain place at a certain time?) or diachronically (How does a discourse strand evolve?). The analysis can focus on a particular discourse plane (= the societal location from which a discourse fragment is produced, for example politics, science, media, everyday life, etc.).

[7] On possible research questions see Keller 2008, 262-268.

The analysis of a discourse strand requires a good overview of the relevant data as well as a careful and systematic interpretation of some representative text samples[8]. As I explained before, in a discourse-theoretical perspective a text is a discourse fragment. In a discourse analysis, then, the analysis of a single text is always carried out as an intermediate step. The objective is the analysis of the discourse strand, either synchronically as a cross section, or diachronically in terms of development.

Discourse analysis denotes basically a research interest and not a specific method. Different hermeneutic tools can be used to investigate a discourse strand, depending on the character of the data.

Usually[9], the analysis of a discourse fragment starts with the analysis of its context, i.e. its historical and social setting[10].

The second step is the analysis of the linguistic and rhetorical structure of the text. The close examination of language and style helps to understand the meaning of the text. Additionally, metaphors, synonyms and other stylistic devices are recorded in order to check if they are characteristic elements in the investigated discourse strand.

The third step of the examination of a discourse fragment is the analysis of its contents. Keller suggests the use of concepts that are derived from the sociology of knowledge[11], for example classifications, phenomenal structures (= the aspects of a phenomenon as described in the discourse) and narrative structures.

Finally, after the analysis of several texts or discourse fragments the structure of the discourse strand can be described. The description of the discourse strand forms the basis for the examination of the research questions I mentioned above.

Applying discourse analysis on Hebrew Bible texts

The discourse analytical approach I described is based mainly on Reiner Keller's work (combined with some concepts coined by Siegfried Jäger). Keller developed his approach from the sociology of knowledge and applied it to contemporary sociological problems. The use of this approach might therefore not seem appropriate for the analysis of Hebrew Bible texts. However, discourse analysis is intended for a transdisciplinary area of research and for the handling of various types of source material. Approaches similar to Keller's have been developed by linguists and historians. There are discourse analytical studies on historical

[8] Keller's and Jäger's methodological propositions are basically developed for text material, but both authors point out that discourse analysis should not be limited to texts (cf. Keller 2007, 82-84; and see Jäger 2006, 56-61 on the analysis of dispositives, which includes discourses, non-discursive practices and materializations).

[9] The three steps in this order are suggested by Keller 2007, 93-108; a similar procedure is proposed by Jäger 2009, 175-187.

[10] On the analysis of context and the distinction between socio-historical context, institutional context and situational context see Keller 2007, 95f.; Landwehr 2008, 105-110.

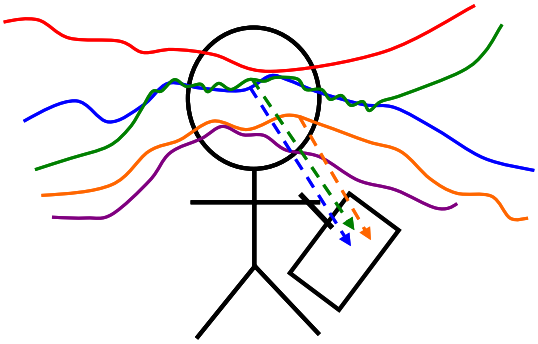
[11] Cf. Keller 2008, 240-252.

subjects, mostly based on texts dating from the 17th century onwards. The Hebrew Bible texts I will examine differ from these historical texts in various aspects: a) they are anonymous, traditional literature; b) their original socio-historical context is largely unknown; and c) they are composite texts that evolved over time. I therefore need to consider whether it is nevertheless possible and helpful to apply this method in my study. In the following passages, I will discuss these aspects and show that it is not only possible to carry out a discourse analytical study under these conditions, but rather that discourse analysis can deal especially well with this kind of texts.

a) Discourse analysis and traditional literature

The biblical texts I examine are anonymous texts. They might be written by one or several persons, about whom we know virtually nothing. Although this is not usually the case for more recent texts that are examined in historical and sociological discourse analysis, anonymous authorship is not an obstacle to discourse analysis.

Discourse theory does not attach much importance to individual authors. Of course, discourses would not exist without people producing them through their contributions. But the persons who produce texts are not autonomous agents, as their knowledge is shaped by previously established discourses. Also, they have to join existing discourses (by following their rules) in order to say something meaningful and true. From a discourse theoretical point of view, a certain configuration of discourse strands informs a certain discourse fragment.



The individual author of this discourse fragment is a person whose mind is shaped by this configuration. For the study of discourse strands, information about the identity of this person is irrelevant. It is sufficient to identify the configuration of discourse strands that forms the basis of the discourse fragment.

Discourse analysis can thus cope with anonymous texts easily. It is not concerned with the identity and mental state of individual authors. Instead, it considers a text (a discourse fragment) as a collective, societal product. Traditional literature like the Hebrew Bible provides material particularly appropriate for discourse analysis, as its texts are already acknowledged by a discursive community. It is improbable that a text completely disconnected from collective discourses, shared concerns and ways of talking, could enter such a collection. Also, a concept of the individual author as an autonomous artist does not seem to correspond to the self-concept of the authors of the texts I am studying. Pseudepigraphic texts like the Letter of Jeremiah indicate that placing the text within an existing tradition (which includes the need to comply with established rules) is considered more important than the identity of the actual author. An interpretation of these texts on a

societal rather than individual level is therefore consistent with their formation, their intention and their use.

b) Discourse analysis and the historical context of a text

Biblical texts are not released with reliable information about the date, the place and the historical circumstances of their composition. Thus, it is not possible to start with an analysis of the historical context, as is usually recommended for sociological and historical discourse analyses. Nonetheless, the lack of context information does not impede the use of discourse analysis.

I will first discuss the relation between text and context from a discourse theoretical perspective. The second part of the chapter deals with the type of context that is particularly relevant to discourse studies.

i. Context as surrounding reality: the relation between text and context

"Historical context" means the surrounding reality of a text. Contemporary exegetes have widely abandoned the view of the Bible as a book of history. They appreciate skillful writing and creative reinterpretations of events in biblical texts. A text does not need to relate historically reliable information and its relevance is not dependent on its confirmation by archeological findings. Nonetheless, a certain relation between text and real life (or context) is often assumed without further reflection.

Discourse analysis shares the concern of taking texts seriously in their own right and not merely as a source of information about the historical context. But at the same time, it is concerned with the world outside the text, with questions of power and of options of acting. Discourse analysis thus provides an appropriate framework for an exegesis which does not measure the importance of texts by their quality as historical sources and which at the same time is not a (text-immanent) literary criticism without concern for the socio-historical context.

It is important here to remember how discourse theory conceives the relationship of text and reality. Discourse theory rejects the idea that a text mirrors a pre-existing reality. Texts, as discourse fragments, do not passively represent reality, but participate actively in the shaping of reality. This discourse theoretical basis has three important consequences for the consideration of the historical context, showing that texts constitute a valuable source of information even where, as for biblical texts, the context is uncertain.

1) Historical discourse analysis is not focused on the context, using the texts merely as a source of information on past reality. Instead, it is focused on the process of the shaping of reality through discourses, i.e. on the *connection* of texts and reality. Discourse analysis usually proceeds from the texts towards reality. Its starting point is the question: "What means the fact that certain phenomena can be observed repeatedly in texts, images,

artefacts or practices? And what does this potentially reveal about the constitution of forms of knowledge, social relationships and cultural systems of meanings?"[12]

2) The historical context does not provide an exhaustive explanation of a text or the reason of its existence. A text is not a passive representation of reality, its form and content cannot be explained by stating that this was simply what "really" happened. An author has always various possibilities of acting (which includes writing) in view of a certain reality. These options are limited by socially established discursive rules. Discourse theory is not deterministic, it acknowledges the creative power of human beings. An analysis of a discourse strand is primarily concerned with the rules and the structure of the discourse strand. Individual choices of acting are thus taken into account as socially possible options and evaluated with regard to discursive rules.

3) Discourse theory disqualifies texts as historical sources in a traditional sense (they do not reflect a past reality). But at the same time it establishes the theoretical basis for an alternative appreciation of texts as important historical sources. Ancient texts, as discourse fragments, do indeed contain information on the past. Yet, an ancient text is not a window to past "reality": it is a window to past discourse. As a fragment of an ancient discourse, a text follows certain discursive rules and structures established previously. It thus provides information about such rules and structures (i.e. the societal knowledge it reproduces). But as a fragment of an ancient discourse, a text also played an active part in this past discourse and consequently in shaping the ancient reality[13]. It not only reproduced, but also produced knowledge. Thus, texts can be used as historical sources in discourse analysis, namely as sources for a history of discourses.

ii. Context as institutional context: power relations in discursive fields

After these more general considerations on the relation of text and context (as historical background) in discourse theory, I would like to turn to the more practical side of discourse analysis. What use is made of context information in discourse analysis, and what impact has the lack of such information on the analysis of biblical texts?

Since discourse analysis is not only concerned with texts, but with the shaping of reality through discourses, special attention is paid to the *institutional* context[14]. To examine the institutional setting of a text, different aspects of the surrounding reality need to be considered. Context information is required to determine the discourse plane. Information

[12] Landwehr 2008, 106 ("Was bedeutet die Tatsache, dass in Texten, Bildern, Artefakten oder Praktiken wiederholt bestimmte Phänomene zu beobachten sind, und was sagt dies möglicherweise über die Konstitution von Wissensformen, sozialen Beziehungen und kulturellen Bedeutungsnetzen aus?").

[13] Obviously, a single text is only a tiny fragment of a discourse which shapes reality. Whether the statements of a texts are an effective production (or modification) of knowledge, has to be verified in the broader context of the discourse strand (cf.Jäger 2009, 170). Reception history is particularly suited to reveal the impact of statements.

[14] On the analysis of the institutional context cf. Jäger 2009, 176-178.

about the social position and function of the author, or about the institution he or she speaks for, provide important indications on the power distribution in a discursive field. In a diachronic perspective, this kind of data informs on the effects of discourses. It might be possible, for example, to show how a discourse strand spreads to other discourse planes, or by which means and strategies it gains influence. A "successful" discourse strand will have an impact on legislation and give rise to new institutions.

Direct information on these issues is not available for the polemical texts I am studying. The bearers of this discourse strand and their institutional context are a matter of debate.

Rarely, hints on the institutional context can be discovered in the text themselves[15]. Where this is not the case, it might be possible to circumvent the lacking context information. Information on the institutional context is used in conventional discourse analysis to determine the position of power of a certain discourse fragment, the distribution of power in a certain discursive field, or the effects of a discourse (in terms of institutionalisation). Questions of power relations and effects need not to be abandoned when dealing with biblical texts. Alternative ways of investigation can be used for the same purpose.

Thus, redaction history and reception history provide information on the effects of the polemical discourse against other gods. The *Fortschreibung* of the polemical texts (which can be seen for example in the different literary layers of Jer 10) indicates that the earlier text continued to be read and was considered relevant to an ongoing discourse. Reception history shows which elements turn out to be influential. It remains to be seen if connections can be made with other discourse planes, discourse strands or even with material sources. Where the effects of the discourse are to be expected, depends on the findings concerning the discursive rules and structures. Thus, a line of reasoning characteristic of this discourse strand could have spread to another discourse strand. In this way, the discourse against other gods could have had an impact in places where a connection with this kind of polemics is not obvious[16].

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[15] Thus, the fact that an Aramaic sentence appears in Jer 10 (Jer 10,11: כִּדְנָה תֵּאמְרוּן לְהוֹם אֱלָהַיָּא דִּי־שְׁמַיָּא וְאַרְקָא לָא עֲבַדוּ יֵאבַדוּ מֵאַרְעָא וּמִן־תְּחוֹת שְׁמַיָּא אֵלֶּה:) points to a possible second discourse plane, different from the rest of the chapter: Polemics against other gods are not only a subject matter (presumably) among Hebrew scribes, but there are also people talking about other gods (and playing on words) in Aramaic.

[16] For instance, 1 Pe 1,18 (εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ φθαρτοῖς, ἀργυρίῳ ἢ χρυσίῳ, ἐλυτρώθητε ἐκ τῆς ματαίας ὑμῶν ἀναστροφῆς πατροπαραδότου) is generally interpreted against the background of the ransoming of slaves. But, in addition, "silver and gold" could allude to the polemics against other gods (cf. for example Isa 40,19; 46,6; Jer 10,5; Wis 13,10; Ps 115,4). Several elements in 1 Pe 1,18 point to this discourse: the use of φθαρτός (cf. Wis 14,8; Rom 1,23) and μάταιος (cf. Isa 44,9; Wis 13,1; 15,8 and hb. הֶבֶל), and the idea that it is necessary to turn away from the customs of the forefathers (cf. for example Jdg 6,25; Jub 11-12; apparently, this discourse strand does not share the narrative structure "idolatry is turning towards gods you and your fathers did not know before" which can be found for example in Dtn 28,64; Jer 44,3).

c) Discourse analysis and diachronic analysis

The most striking particularity of the texts I am studying, as compared to texts sociologists usually study, is that they evolved over time. This is undeniable for Jer 10, where the Masoretic text is longer and arranged differently from the Septuagint text. It seems to me that other polemical texts, too, contain additions and alterations. Such texts provide not only information that can be used for investigating the structure of a discourse strand at a certain moment in time. The diachronic reconstruction of their growth also provides information about the development of discourse strands.

The question of the development of discourse strands is not at all alien to discourse analysis[17]. The diachronic dimension of discourses is inherent in Siegfried Jäger's definition of discourses as "flow of knowledge through time". Every discourse strand necessarily has a history and evolves over time. Discourses are not dictated by nature, they do not have other explanations and causes than their own history[18]. Therefore, discourses cannot be thought of without a temporal dimension.

The diachronic investigation of discourse strands is a laborious task. Many historical discourse analytical studies focus on a cross section of a discourse strand at a certain moment in time. However, a number of studies exists which investigate how discourse strands evolved. Research questions concern the change of discourses, their entanglement with other discourse strands and their effects up to their institutionalization in laws and institutions[19].

The reconstruction of discourse development I intend to do is not essentially different from this kind of historical reconstruction. Only, in addition to developmental lines which combine several texts, I also consider developmental lines within a text. This is not necessarily problematic, since a text is not a binding unity in discourse analysis. Discourse strands consist of discourse fragments. A text can address several themes and thus contain several discourse fragments belonging to different discourse strands[20].

Within the theoretical model provided by discourse theory, various interpretative approaches can be combined. The temporal dimension is essential to the concept of discourse strands. Nontheless, the use of tools developed primarily for synchronic analysis (e.g. rhetorical criticism) is necessary to reconstruct the rules of a discourse strand. These discursive rules can be reconstructed for different stages of the development of the discourse strand.

[17] Process, change and development are essential to the research questions proposed by Keller 2008, 262f. Landwehr 2008, 21 mentions the evolution of discourses as a main concern of historical discourse analysis.
[18] Cf. Landwehr 2008, 97.
[19] An example would be Kury's study (Kury 2006) on the discourse strand of "Überfremdung" (= being swamped by foreigners/strangers) in Switzerland. He analyses the evolution of this discourse strand from its formation at the beginning of the 20th century up to its institutionalisation in law in 1931 and its effects on (Jewish) refugees during the Second World War.
[20] Jäger 2006, 47.

Discourse analysis thus allows for the integration of various methods (diachronic and synchronic) that are currently used for the study of biblical texts.
The evolution of the texts (both in the process of their formation and in the history of their reception) provides important information about the characteristics, the development and the effects of the discourse strand. The polemical texts I am studying seem to have gone through a lively process of editing. I think that, in this case, a discourse analytical study based on carefully reconstructed stages of the growth of the texts will be an appropriate way of proceeding.

Discourse analysis: its suitability for my study

Although developed for other fields of research, discourse analysis appears to be a possible and reasonable approach for Hebrew Bible texts.
To be useful and beneficial for my project, it should enable me to investigate my initial questions. As I stated at the beginning, I need a theoretical framework for the description and the analysis of the polemical texts as a group, and I am concerned with the function of the polemical texts with regard to real life. How does discourse analysis then meet this requirement?

From a discourse analytical perspective, the polemical texts against other gods can be described as fragments of a certain discourse strand. These texts show similarities of style and motifs, because they participate in the same discourse strand and thus follow the same discursive rules. Literary dependence has to be taken into account, but it is not the only possible connection between the texts.
The conceptualisation of the polemics as a discourse strand also allows for the investigation of its development. Rules can be modified, the discourse strand can be entangled with other discourse strands or split up into several discourse strands. Many of the polemical texts are secondary additions to other texts and show traces of textual growth. The reconstruction of their redactional history allows to observe very closely the development of the discourse strand they participate in.
Discourse analysis is essentially concerned with the power of discourses. It is not only text analysis, but it is focused on the process of the constitution of knowledge. This knowledge forms the basis of human actions. Thus, from a discourse analytical point of view, texts cannot be thought of without a connection to non-textual reality and a potential impact on real life. Discourse theory provides a general answer to the question of the function of texts: Discourses shape reality by producing and reproducing knowledge, and a text (as a discourse fragment) participates in this process. The vague question of the function of the polemical texts can be stated more precisely when considered from this point of view. To

study the function of the polemical texts, I have to investigate how the discourse strand they participate in shapes reality. The question of the function can therefore be put in these terms:

- Which aspect(s) of reality does this discourse strand shape? (e.g. foreign gods, idols, idol worshippers...)
- What knowledge about this aspect (or these aspects) does this discourse strand establish? (e.g. certain classifications, narratives, instructions, self-positioning...)

Additionally, the discourse analytical description offers a new perspective on the biblical texts. This is especially helpful to circumvent engrained categories of thinking. I will conclude this paper with a short example on Wis 13-15.

Older studies on Wis 13-15 tended to assume a binary opposition between biblical and hellenistic features[21]. This has proved inappropriate in view of the historical circumstances and has been abandoned by more recent scholars[22]. A discourse analytical approach does not focus on pre-defined social groups, but on discourse strands. The question then is: In which discourse strands does Wis 13-15 participate (and how are they entangled), and what discourses is it opposed to?

Potential results can be:

- Wis 13-15 is a fragment of the polemical discourse against other gods: Its opening sentence is closely parallel to Jer 10,14[23]. It shows some characteristics that might be part of the rules of this discourse strand, for example the use of μάταιος (13,1; 15,8; cf. Isa 44,9; corresponds to the Hebrew הֶבֶל), the insistence on the materials the gods are made of (namely silver and gold, and wood), or the inclusion of short narrative sequences illustrating the unworthy provenience and the incapacities of the gods (13,11-15; 14,1; 14,7-9; cf. Isa 44,14-17). This discourse strand appears to belong to a special discourse, produced and shared in Jewish and Christian communities.
- Wis 13-15 contains fragments of a cosmological discourse: Wis 13,1-9 links polemics with the discourse on systematic explanation of the nature of the universe. This discourse strand can be traced back to pre-Socratic natural philosophers. Platon's Timaios as well as Gen 1 participate in this broad discourse strand. Within the cosmological discourse,

[21] Cf. for example Gilbert 1973.

[22] "Hellenistic" education is part of the author's identity (cf. Winston 2005, 9). Philosophy and religious tradition are not separated in Middle Platonism which constitutes the intellectual background of Wis (cf. Collins 1997, 200-202).

[23]

Wis 13,1	Jer 10,14
Μάταιοι μὲν γὰρ	נִבְעַר / ἐμωράνθη
πάντες ἄνθρωποι	כָּל־אָדָם / πᾶς ἄνθρωπος
φύσει,	
οἷς παρῆν θεοῦ ἀγνωσία	מִדַּעַת / ἀπὸ γνώσεως

various subordinate discourse strands compete. Thus, the discourse fragment Wis 13,1-9 could be part of a discourse opposing a Stoic cosmological discourse.

- Wis 13-15 contains fragments of an anti-Egyptian discourse: The critique of animal worship (Wis 15,18f.) appears to be a characteristic feature of anti-Egyptian discourse. This discourse strand is not limited to religious polemics. It seems to be based on the discourse on barbarians, and was particularly brought forward by Octavian's propaganda against Antony during the civil war[24].

Apparently, fragments of several discourses are combined in Wis 13-15. Some of these discourse strands are limited to certain restricted groups, while others are accessible to a more general public. A description of this discourse entanglement and its effects might be an adequate and illuminating alternative to the separation of Greek/pagan and Jewish/biblical elements.

Discourse analysis, thus, is a very suitable tool to investigate my initial questions. The conceptualisation of the polemics as a discourse strand not only provides a coherent theoretical framework within which the questions of development and of function can be addressed. The use of discourse analysis can also contribute to open up new ways of thinking. This is particularly relevant for my study, as a deeper investigation of the polemical texts is often inhibited by the assumption of a natural opposition between monotheism and polytheism. The discourse analytical approach allows a different perspective on these texts, which will potentially provide new insights on the social meaning of the polemics against other gods.

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[24] On the anti-Egyptian discourse in the Roman Empire, see Niehoff 2001, 49ff. (with focus on Philo).

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