

# Notes

## Introduction

All biblical quotations are taken from *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Alt 1997). Translations are my own.

1. In biblical cosmology, a solid structure (רָקִיעַ, *rāqia'*) of some kind supported the heavens, referred to classically as a “firmament” in the King James Version of the Bible. Waters held above it would occasionally fall down as rain (Gen. 1; Ezek. 1:22–25; see also Job 22:14 and Amos 9:6, which may refer to the same idea).
2. A few others have outlined a different version of the fourth dogma (e.g., M. L. Anderson and Chemero 2013; M. L. Anderson 2006).
3. Ironically, as Riesebrodt points out, abandoning concepts simply because they are constructed naïvely assumes “a direct correspondence between reality and concepts” in general (7) and thus may paradoxically import a bankrupt correspondence theory through the back door.
4. I have discussed radical interpretation at length elsewhere (G. Levy 2012, 2014), as have others (Malpas 1992; Davidson 1994a; Fodor and Lepore 1994; Engler and Gardiner 2015; Gardiner 2016; Heal 2017).
5. For a recent summary of Davidson, see Glüer (2011).
6. The idea that some forms of writing are a kind of fire comes from a famous tradition in Talmud Yerushalmi attributed to R. Shimon b. Lakish by R. Pinchas (Šeqalim 6:1, 25B). Quoting the blessing in Deuteronomy 33 that Moses recites before his death (33:2), which depicts Yahweh holding some kind of fire by his right (hand), the tradition says the Torah that the Holy One gave to Moses was made of white fire inscribed by black fire: “It was fire, mixed with fire, hewn from fire and given by fire” (see Verman 2007, 97).

## Chapter 1

1. For more comments on this essay, see G. Levy (2012).

2. I think we need to be very careful about attributing maturation in consciousness. On the one hand, it is good for us to think that our species can become more mature over time (Pinker 2018). On the other hand, there is a danger in thinking we are more mature in terms of consciousness than other creatures, which may betray our own anthropocentric and perhaps Eurocentric biases.

3. Frankenberry differentiates a desire that could cause a belief from a need. The latter runs the risk of importing functionalist language. Since needs “differ from both beliefs and desires in not being governed by any fundamental norms for the way we variously attribute them in our processes of understanding,” they provide no explanatory value (2014, 206). Rather, needs are what must be explained.

## Chapter 2

1. Radical explorations of the mind are starting to make a comeback, even in the academic world, probably because of the new psychedelics (E. Davis 2019; Wyrđ et al. 2019). I discuss psychedelics in the context of creativity in chapter 4.

2. “The agent slot contains information about who it is that believes something, whereas the attitude slot contains information about the attitude in question: belief, pretence, lying, etc. An anchor is a primary representation of reality to which an embedded representation refers. A proposition slot is where the content of a belief or desire is stored. A time tag, for its part, specifies when the agent in question held the belief she did” (Pyysiäinen 2003, 115).

3. In this discussion, Munz wrongly claims that “natural selection can be made to cease” (282).

4. I tried in vain to interest Davidson in the subject of religion when I took seminars with him at Berkeley a few years before his death.

5. For more on the theoretical analysis of living systems, see the website of the “Theory of Living Matter Group” at the University of Cambridge, <https://www.tcm.phy.cam.ac.uk/tlm>.

6. “By twenty, no race-car-driving rebel, I was a guitar player on the streets of Asbury Park and already a member in good standing amongst those who ‘lie’ in service of the truth . . . artists with a small ‘a’” (Springsteen 2016, xv). This sentiment may go back to Picasso: “We all know that art is not truth. Art is a lie that makes us realize truth, at least the truth that is given us to understand. The artist must know the manner whereby to convince others of the truthfulness of his lies” (Picasso 1923, 315).

7. Van Leeuwen does not think that “religious states of mind” arise from a “separate dedicated system,” but rather from “general, widely shared and widely used human psychological capacities” (709). If this is the case, what metaphysics underlies these types of beliefs? In other words, do they actually cut anything off at the joints, or are they simply a way of categorizing different mental states based on an arbitrary definition of what we think of as “religion”?

8. Van Leeuwen argues, following Sosis and Alcorta (2003), that “the very strangeness of the professed ‘belief’ or the costliness of the non-verbal behavior renders the signal strong and hence a credible sign of allegiance” (710). This point is quite similar to Munz, for Van Leeuwen notes, “This is all strikingly different from factual belief. A factual belief that one rock is heavier than another is not a signal of group membership; nor are factual beliefs generally.”

### Chapter 3

1. This point is similar to Frans De Waal’s about interpreting primates (1999, 2009). In stark contrast, Pascal Boyer thinks science should not even anthropomorphize human beings and that doing so “has been the main obstacle to having a proper science of human behavior” (2018, 24).

2. In our evolutionary past, from the moment we started walking bipedally and were adapted to walking long distances, free thinking about animal behavior would become extremely important (Willerslev 2007). Hunting for most of our history probably involved wounding an animal and then tracking it over great distances until it died (Bloch 1992; Carruthers 2002; Sharps et al. 2002; Bailey, Myatt, and Wilson 2013; Lombard and Gärdenfors 2017; Gärdenfors and Lombard 2018).

3. The responses proceed in that order, with “fright,” or playing dead, as the last (see Bracha [2004]). First the animal will freeze. If that doesn’t work, it tries to run away. If that doesn’t work, all it has left to do is fight or play dead. Freeze is about trying to hide, while fright is more about deception and distraction. Note that not just mammals show this response (see Rupia et al. [2016]).

4. There is a lot of opposition to such ideas in the scientific community. See Jerry Coyne’s blog for many examples: <https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com>.

5. This is where we find some of the most important differences between “religion” and “science”; it is the difference between fiction and science fiction. Religions are not so quickly self-critical, though some are deeply ironic.

6. I do not mean to equate the academic disciplines of theology and religious studies but merely to point out that scholars in religious studies are good at comparing theologies to one another. Both theologians and scholars of religion do such comparison, but they usually have different aims.

### Chapter 4

1. Dehaene is referring to the fact that “their number lines spontaneously match a compressive logarithmic law” developed by the Scottish mathematician John Napier in the sixteenth century (265).

2. “All the major early commentaries on *Sefer Yetzirah* treat it as a scientific work” (P. Alexander 2014, 31n15). See also Jospe (1990).

3. See <https://physics.info/equations/> and <https://physics.info/constants/>.
4. This is the “brute force” method by which some AI language algorithms work, such as Open AI. This point also resembles Davidson’s application of Alfred Tarski’s truth theory to semantics (see Glüer 2011, chapter 2).
5. Gimbel thinks some Jews, such as Durkheim, exhibit a similar “style of thinking,” and some, like Freud, do not. Furthermore, this style of thinking is not unique to Jews. Mel Alexenberg (2006) makes a similar point with regard to architectural space.
6. I discussed the subject of communicating with aliens in relation to Davidson’s principle of charity in G. Levy (2012).

## Chapter 5

1. Mark Turner (1996) made a similar argument more than twenty years ago, which has recently been updated by evolutionary psychologist Jonathan Gottschall (2012). Narratives were perhaps preceded by mantras (see Staal [1985]).
2. See also the Werner Herzog’s film about the ancient paintings at Chauvet in southern France, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010). The African caves Wiebe discusses are actually much older.
3. See the *Middle English Dictionary* (Regents University of Michigan) and the *Oxford English Dictionaries* (Oxford University Press), Online.
4. However, I think Laderman is wrong to accept the theory from 2003 that the evolutionary roots of celebrity should be traced to prestige (2009, 187n12). Even if we were to accept the just-so story about the origin of prestige, that tells us little about modern forms of celebrity worship, which are more connected to technology, to seeing someone’s “name in lights” (Douglas 2003). For the article on prestige Laderman cites, see Henrich and Gil-White (2001).
5. The literature on rising/dying gods is too numerous to cite in full. Frazer first popularized the idea in the study of religions. Among others, he characterized the Canaanite god Baal as such (Frazer [1890] 2009). T. S. Eliot used *The Golden Bough* as a model in his poem “The Waste Land,” which incorporates many of the images under discussion in this text, such as celebrity, death, and language. See the iPad app *The Waste Land*.
6. Beneveniste writes that early Indo-Europeans did not have a word for what we call religion. Instead, “the only thing which could be credited to the original community would be the idea of ‘god.’ This is well attested in the form \**deiwos*, the sense of which is ‘luminous’ and ‘celestial’; this is the quality which marks the god off from human beings, who are ‘terrestrial’ (such is the meaning of the Latin word for ‘man,’ *homo*)” (446).

7. For a critique of “ocularcentrism,” see Derrida (1978). Both phenomenology and empiricism are centrally dependent on light. I think our ocularcentrism runs much deeper than “western” thought, though, probably to the core of human, even primate, cognition (Land and Nilsson 2012).

8. This is not to suggest that blind people do not have cognition. The bodies and brains of blind people adapt processes that would respond to visual stimuli to other stimuli, such as sound and touch (Bedny, Pascual-Leone, and Saxe 2009).

9. For a great summary of the state of the art of neuromarketing, see Ariely and Berns (2010). They argue that much of the popular representation of neuromarketing is overblown hype and try to lay out some ethical guidelines for the emerging field to help it avoid a clearly ominous potential.

