




Judaic Technologies of the Word: A Cognitive Analysis of Jewish Cultural Formation, by Gabriel Levy, New York: Routledge, 2012, vi + 218 pp. ISBN: 978 1 908049 084 1, US\$120.00 (hardback); ISBN 978 1 13 885612 7, US\$49.95 (paperback)


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perspective is also present in this volume: a chapter by Jay Johnston (410–425) aims at examining esotericism's interrelations with gender. The role of women in Theosophy, Spiritualism, New Age, and Neo-Paganism provides a natural exemplification of the connection. Sexual non-normativity, a subject of research within queer studies, also gets implicated here by showing that unstable sexual and social roles that are prone to re-definition are also present in religious contexts.

In conclusion, the book is definitely a must for those who are interested in new and alternative religious movements. It is to say that both researchers focused on particular esoteric traditions or the occult in general and those interested in current issues in religious studies will benefit from this reading. Methodological and terminological issues that were raised can be considered as important voices in the ongoing academic discussion on the nature of contemporary religion and spirituality. The substantial influences that esoteric movements have on popular culture may be a reason for researchers in fields other than religious studies, sociology, or cultural studies to have an interest in *Contemporary Esotericism*. As a concluding remark, we would like to state that school and developmental psychologists (who otherwise are among the least likely to read this book) may benefit from familiarizing themselves with Daniel Kline's analysis (351–371) of esoteric discourse around Indigo Children (a growing category of children displaying symptoms of disorders like autism, ADHD, or ADD).

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The study of literate transmission in religions is an important task that has not been embraced by the classical works and theories of the Cognitive Science of Religion. Levy's monograph joins a handful of contributions dedicated to the cognitive study of religious texts. Judaism is a religious tradition intimately bound up with literacy, providing an outstanding case for an in-depth investigation of how religious thought and behavior is shaped by literate transmission (and vice versa). Let us note that from the 19th century, critical scholarship of the Hebrew Bible (represented by emblematic scholars such as Julius Wellhausen and Hermann Gunkel) played a key role in the formation of modern Biblical Studies and the academic study of religious texts in general. *Judaic Technologies* thus continues a time-honored tradition of biblical scholarship that has been at the forefront of innovation.

Instead of simply drawing on the sophisticated philological tools of Hebrew Bible studies or applying the existing key concepts of the Cognitive Science of

Religion to the analysis of Jewish literate practices, Levy presents an ambitious and far-ranging intellectual program that situates Jewish literacy in the framework of human evolution. After outlining the main ideas and structure of the book in Chapter one, in Chapter two the author sets out to define cognition and establish a theoretical framework for its study. Most importantly, Levy proposes an alternative approach to religious cognition that replaces the 'standard model' of the Cognitive Science of Religion (37). Among others, the standard model applies eliminative materialism (a sort of wrong reductionism), determinism, and methodological individualism and situates cognition in the head; the alternative approach, in turn, replaces these methodological presuppositions by anomalous monism, indeterminism, methodological pluralism, and embodied cognition, respectively. The term 'anomalous monism' (39–40) refers to a philosophical framework put forward by Donald Davidson that denies the existence of a law-like relationship between descriptions of material-physical firings in the brain, on the one hand, and cultural-semantic patterns, on the other. In all fairness, it would be difficult to find examples of the Cognitive Science of Religion reducing religion to firing patterns of neurons. However, it is certainly true that standard cognitive approaches lack the ability to account for the connection between meaning and action, as noted by Donald Wiebe previously (cited on 38). This, in turn, limits the potential of the standard model in addressing the historical dimension of religion.

Levy's own approach (which he keeps developing throughout the book) is based on explanation as multilevel description (45, drawing on Carl Crever). According to this pragmatic concept of explanation, a particular explanation is made more likely if it is consistent with multiple theoretically and causally independent techniques and perspectives. According to Levy, folk intuitions have to be taken seriously (even natural science is influenced by such concepts), which means that what the rest of the world thinks of religion has to play an important role in a scientific account of religion. Applying this general framework to Judaism, the goal of the study is to understand the role of literate education in creating Judaic bodies and minds as well as the interaction of attitudes and practices in Judaic systems with human organisms as they develop over time.

Jewish literature, Levy suggests in Chapters three through five, emerged as an advanced form of divination. Prophecy in the Hebrew Bible is a type of divination that involves communication with one particular superhuman agent; it is a form of mind reading that depends on a revelatory moment rather than on mechanistic operations (60). With time, however, Judaism started to turn to the biblical text itself for knowledge or information, for example, by using the technique of Gematria (which is based on attributing a numerical equivalent to each letter of the Hebrew alphabet). Levy compares divination as a means of acquiring knowledge to science, the latter interrogating the natural and the mental worlds with experimentation. Whereas science interprets data in the framework of mathematics and the praxis of falsification, Judaic systems do so in the context of theology (96). Theology, however, means something different in Jewish practice than in the Christian tradition. Levy distinguishes two forms of Judaism with respect to their conception of the relation between language and the world (Chapter seven). In the Greek-inspired tradition, God speaks a 'magic,' self-interpreting language. This concept of the divine word (found in the works of Philo and Maimonides, among others) is based on the Platonic tradition that also influenced modern

Western philosophy, which regards the laws of nature as god-like words 'in which every detail of every possible circumstance is already implicit' (137, quoting Samuel Wheeler). The Christian Church largely followed this path of Jewish interpretation, turning to allegory and metaphor to decipher difficult passages. The 'rabbinic philology of language' (127), by contrast, understood God's word as incomplete and underdetermined, partly contingent on human decision. It was left to the rabbis to fill in the gaps in a project of moral psychology (with the purpose of finding solutions to actual problems of their time). As a consequence, Levy argues (176), the 'Hebrew' paradigm of textual interpretation considers nature a text, taking the relation between token (linguistic sign representing an object) and type (linguistic sign representing a concept) to be dynamic, complex, and ephemeral. The 'Greek' tradition, on the other hand, reduced complexity so that simple minds can know something about the word.

Not only did Judaism develop a particular hermeneutical tradition, it also gave the written text a particular place in its cultural system (Chapter eight). Gene-culture co-evolution and niche construction provide theoretical frameworks for understanding this connection. Levy cites scholarship on the role of extended childhood (and dependency on adults) in the human species, highlighting major transitions in child development (such as the assumed appearance of mind reading around the age of four). The author then goes on to discuss the treatment of the human lifecycle in Jewish tradition and suggests that rituals (such as the festival of weeks, functioning as a rite of passage for boys entering school) as well as other institutionalized arrangements (such as the marriage system) presented evolutionary pressures that shaped the genome of the Jewish people. A particular outcome of this biocultural setup, according to Levy, is the high level of verbal and reasoning skills that has been measured in American Jews. The author leaves the question open as to whether the thriving of Jews in modern science and other cultural areas is a result of biocultural evolution or a social-historical outcome (178–181).

Our compact presentation of the main ideas of the book obviously cannot do justice to every nuance of the argument or the many interesting suggestions put forward by the author. On a critical note, however, it should be added that the book discusses a great variety of contributions on cognition, language, evolution, and development, often repeatedly and across multiple chapters, leaving the reader wishing for a more transparent structure and perhaps a more consistent theoretical architecture. Having said that, I also have to express my appreciation of the book's ambition to engage in grand theorizing, which has gone out of scholarly fashion in the last few decades. Ultimately, there is tremendous intellectual value in looking for some broader theoretical framework in which one can make sense of the many observations and insights that individual thinkers in diverse disciplines gain about myriad aspects of the natural world and the human condition. This is, if I am correct, the underlying programmatic aim of this study, at least as far as the study of religion is concerned.

The multidisciplinary approach of the book is thought provoking and refreshing. Yet the cross-fertilization of paradigms is not always equally helpful. For example, inviting the concepts of digital sampling and noise from electrical engineering, certain aspects of human communication can be approached (140–142). However, it is unlikely that analogue devices would transmit some 'subliminal energy' on account of being noisy. The revival of the vinyl record has more to do

with nostalgia than any subliminal effect of the noise (and distortion) that analog LPs and turntables output (in spite of all the best engineering efforts to reduce such outcomes). Further, digital technology is definitely not based on eliminating information that is 'thought to be beyond normal human perception.' More importantly, Levy's use of the concept of noise to understand religion remains too sketchy and arbitrary. The representation of language in the written medium evidently results in the loss of information transmitted by the meta-communicative aspects of orality (Levy's 'analogue feelings'). This is, however, different from the influence of distracting noises or phonetic ambiguity on communication, both of which can be called 'noise.' Whether Levy's 'semantic noise' belongs to the former or latter category is unclear. Further, semantic ambiguity can be present in both oral and written texts. At any rate, the difference between oral and written communication could be perhaps compared to the difference between listening to live performance and recorded music rather than to the principal differences between the analog and digital transmissions of information. Written texts that have an oral style are still written texts lacking most meta-communicative and contextual information: one could perhaps compare them to recordings of live concerts. Levy does not spell out the idea of religion as 'noise' in human culture in much detail. The suggestion that scholars of religion interpret religious 'noise' (in the sense discussed above) as myth or the sacred is not very convincing at first sight.

Perhaps the most controversial idea of the book is Jewish literacy as an evolutionary pressure (Chapter eight). As mentioned above, the author leaves the question open as to whether genetic adaptation to Jewish literate culture took place. Still the problem deserves a brief discussion at this place since it is closely related to one of the most interesting and contested areas of evolutionary theory. It is widely acknowledged that culture exerts pressure on genetic evolution, of which the emergence of lactose tolerance in adults as a response to dairy farming in some parts of the world is a well-known example. Could Jewish literacy (and the rituals that focus on it) possibly exert substantial influence on the genome of the Jewish population in about 1000 years (the timeframe suggested on 161)? The author follows Stephen C. Levinson in allowing for genetic change in such a short amount of time (40 generations). However, recent analyses of the human genome have demonstrated that the time needed for the population-wide spread of beneficial genetic mutations is on the order of tens of thousand of years, and even quick adaptations such as the spread of lactose tolerance need a few thousand years (Gibbons 2010). The number of generations cited by Levy equals that found in D. Belyaev's experiment with silver foxes; however, here each generation was hand-picked according to the selection criterion (tameness), which does not happen even under the harshest natural conditions. Notwithstanding these critical remarks, gene-culture interaction remains one of the important areas that future work on the evolutionary aspects of religion has to take into consideration. Arguably, religion shaped the human niche and thus the human genome consistently and considerably for tens of thousands of years.

The book is an important contribution to both Jewish Studies and the Cognitive Science of Religion. The advance of the 'cognitive turn' in the field of Religious Studies is only a question of time and scale. The book offers a fresh and critical perspective on using Cognitive Science in the study of religious literature. There is no doubt that many of the topics raised by this valuable monograph will be followed up by future research in Religious Studies and biblical scholarship.

Reference

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The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity, by Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, xi + 268 pp. ISBN 978 0 19 995988 4, US\$35.00 (hardback)

In 2006, sociologist James Spickard published an article entitled, 'What is Happening to Religion? Six Sociological Narratives.' In this article, Spickard summarized various theories that attempt to explain the changes of Western religion, including each theory's strengths and weaknesses. The fourth of these narratives Spickard calls 'Religious Individualism,' which he describes as 'a fundamental shift in the locus of religion from organizations to individuals' (Spickard 2006, 20). This explanation of religion states that individuals now feel free to blend various religious traditions and practices in a way that was previously uncommon and to create for themselves a set of religious beliefs and practices that are meaningful and unique to themselves. In *The Deconstructed Church: Understanding Emerging Christianity*, Gerardo Marti and Gladys Ganiel employ Spickard's fourth narrative as a lens through which the Emerging Church Movement (ECM) becomes clear. Through a masterful blend of survey data, interviews, and on-site observations, Marti and Ganiel offer a meaningful description and explanation of the ECM for students already familiar with the Emerging Church.

The Deconstructed Church begins with a snapshot introduction to an Emerging Church gathering followed by a working definition of the ECM and a glance at the four arenas in which the ECM lives and breaks new ground: pub churches; Emerging Church conferences; online networks; and neo-monastic communities. Marti and Ganiel provide a look at the history of the ECM and its roots in evangelicalism, and reveal the function of Emerging Church communities: deconstructing 'church.' This introduction provides the necessary background and understanding for the stories and analysis in the following six chapters.

'Pluralist Congregations' introduces several Emerging congregations that illustrate how Emerging Churches promote a variety of personal beliefs and values among congregants. This variety among Emerging Christians shows through the diverse denominational backgrounds of participants, though encouraging multiple, personalized points of view, and through lack of judgment of those with differing beliefs and values. Before moving on, Marti and Ganiel reveal some of the difficulties associated with such diversity in such close connection, but emphasize that these qualities are some of the key distinctive values that unite Emerging congregations.

Where 'Pluralist Congregations' focuses on the ethos of Emerging groups, 'Being an Emerging Christian' focuses on Emerging individuals. This chapter introduces