The Biblical polemic against divination in light of the domestication of folk psychology
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Abstract:
　　　　This paper proposes that the polemic against divination in the Hebrew Bible should be understood in the context of the invention of writing. The polemic was a result of reflection on folk systems made possible by robust literacy. The first part of this paper presents some background about the production of scrolls and the effects of literacy. I then use the communication theories of Wilson, Sperber, and Davidson to generate five communicative principles in the domain of folk psychology, which I argue change in the context of robust literacy. The effects of writing on the communicative principles are understood in terms of the differences between divination and prophecy. I argue for a new form of Biblical criticism that I term *cognitive criticism*.

　　　　There is a polemic against divination in the Hebrew Bible. A few pertinent examples are:

Leviticus 20:6 The soul that turns to the necromancers, mediums, playing the harlot with them, I will set my face against that soul, and I will cut him off from the midst of his people.[1]
Deuteronomy 18:10-12 There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, anyone who practices divination, tells fortunes, or interprets omens – a sorcerer, charmer, medium, wizard or a necromancer – for whoever does these things is an abomination to YHWH (Yahweh). And because of these abominations YHWH-Your-God drives them out from you.

　　　　Though few scholars have focused on the Biblical polemic against divination in particular, we may say that the traditional view toward Biblical polemics in general regard them as forms of doctrinal policing, where those social forces somehow out of control are made illicit and prohibited. Those who follow this approach are too numerous to mention, but the argument follows primarily from both Weber (1962, 1999) and Wellhausen (1889, 1957). This type of theory should be regarded as romantic historical

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[1] This verse comes in the context of the banned practices of the 'Holiness Code,' which is "generally thought to contain an originally independent legal corpus which was later edited from the perspective of the Priestly School," where other forms of 'magic' are also banned. As with most of the Hebrew Bible, scholars dispute the date of its composition. See Friedman (1996), entries "magic" and "holiness code". The polemic also appears in 2 Kgs 21:6 and 2 Chr 33:6; Deut 18:19–11; Lev 19:26, 31; 20:1–6, 27; Exod 22:17; 1 Samuel 28; Isa 8:19; 57:3; Ezek 22:28; Mal 3:5. The great majority of these references are Deuteronomic.

representation with a "fall from grace" narrative plotline, whether it is Weber's version of routinized charisma or Wellhausen's usurpation of divine grace by litigious priests. This theory does not do a very good job explaining the polemic, because it relies on romantic social theory.[2] Like all forms of technology, divination may be conservative *or* destabilizing, depending on the use to which it is put; i.e. divination may reiterate conservative tendencies of the past rather than disturb them. Furthermore, this theory assumes that representations of polemics in a very ancient text were embodied in social practice, though this is not necessarily the case. In fact, given the conceptual similarities between divination and prophecy, one would expect that we cannot find a distinction between these terms in practice. An explanation for the polemic must therefore come by understanding how the group of intellectuals behind the polemic imagined the opposition between the two forms of mediation. The argument I present below, while it does not exclude the above position, suggests a "cognitive" explanation for the polemic. My hypothesis is that the polemic should be understood in the context of the invention of writing; a developmental environment of robust literacy allows for a different kind of reflection on language and competing forms of mediation.

Anthropologist Jack Goody, in his *Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977) was one of the first scholars to posit that writing has a substantial effect on religion. Specifically, he finds that writing encourages competition between religious specialists. This position has been reiterated by Boyer (2001, 273ff.). Goody, who sees diviners as the intellectuals of non-literate societies, argues that due to cognitive changes affected by writing the role of diviner is often usurped by the intellectual historian.

Diviners are responsible for directing people to one or another form of agency, and are thus concerned with the organization of the universe. With writing, he argues that just as the universe becomes reorganized and domesticated[3], so does divination:

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[2] A recent proponent perhaps of the romantic error, in an otherwise outstanding study of "Israelite" divination, is Cryer (1994). Though we agree that prophecy is a form of divination, Cryer tends to conflate the terms, arguing that the polemic against divination (in Deuteronomy 18:10, for example, see 231ff.) should be understood "not as a blanket prohibition on the practice of divination, but as a means of restricting the practice to those who were 'entitled' to employ it, that is, to the central cult figures who enjoyed the warrants of power, prestige, and not least, education, as at least the 'elite' forms of divination [e.g. prophecy] were very much the privilege of the tiny literate stratum of ancient Near Eastern societies." (327) Cryer also emphasizes the close relation between divination, intellectual activity, and literacy (see 138ff and 187ff). Cryer's main goal is not to account for the polemic but to make claims about social practices in "Ancient Israel," which he regards as a "magic society," finding countless examples of magical practice in the Biblical text. Cryer thus reverses the long Protestant tendency to repeat the "Deuteronomic" story about divination. For Cryer it is magic that gets restricted by the "powerful" Deuteronomists, whereas for Wellhausen and Martin Luther it was the priestly emphasis on the law that degrades the original power of prophecy.

[3] The concept of domestication is an important one for my argument, since I am arguing that writing "domesticates" folk systems. The use of the term is based on Goody (1977). The term domestication is usually applied to the domestication of animals, a case in which a wild animal is tamed (i.e. educated or trained) to serve human beings in some way. Goody uses the term to argue that Levi-Strauss's *bricolage*, the skilled manipulation of basic cultural oppositions, is subject to taming once it comes under the gaze of written reflection. We should remember that for Levi-Strauss (1966) the savage mind is our own mind, the mind that evolved in the context of ancient hunter-gatherer societies. Goody's argument is that with writing and education systems this mind is, in effect, domesticated. I argue that human folk systems (physics, biology, sociology, psychology) also evolved in the context of many thousands of years of hunter gatherer life, and undergo a similar kind of domestication. This argument is further similar to the recent accounts of theological correctness, which pose that theology (and "science") tends to pose majorly

If we regard a certain amount of magico-religious activity as oriented towards relatively pragmatic goals, such as the health of one's children or the fertility of one's wife, then appeals to a particular shrine or agency must necessarily fail from time to time… Monotheistic religions have certain ways of dealing with this problem, although many fall back on a pluralistic universe where one may switch one's attention from one aspect (or intermediary) of a deity to another… The agents who introduce or invent these new shrines are often responding to the pressure from below, the demand for new ways. These men are among the intellectuals of non-literate societies. Closely related to this category of person, and often involving the same individuals, is the diviner. This practitioner is faced with a somewhat different problem. His clients may want to know which of the plurality of agencies has been responsible for the misfortunes through which they are going. In directing people to this agency rather than that, he is inevitably concerned with the organization of the universe, with man's relationship to the gods. Moreover he is operating a specialized technique which often involves numerical manipulation as well as a certain degree of mystification. When writing appears, then it is often the most popular divinatory technique precisely because of the access to 'secrets' which it makes possible… (29-30)

But what kinds of social or cognitive effects would lead to such "popularity"? More recently, researchers have concluded that some of the most prominent consequences of the 'shift' to writing were[4]: 1) reflection on writing led to the production of new theories (Olson and Astington 1989; Olson 1995), but especially new objects that competed for cognitive and hermeneutic salience (Boyer 2001, 273ff.), such as the graphic representation of words; 2) a limitation on intentionality, which is the defining feature of the polemic (or so I argue below)[5]; 3) communal systems of propositional attitudes and practices that refer to superhuman agents were changed by the new technology, in part because texts took on some attributes of agents; and 4) a new type of educated specialist usurped the role traditionally held by diviners.

As demonstrated by Schribner and Cole (1981), many of these changes occur because written communicants must craft their compositions while taking into consideration the fact that they do not often share a common environment with their recipients (i.e. they are distant in time and space), thus putting a different type of mental burden on a writer than oral communication. David Olson, a psychologist who supervises one of the few labs that study the cognitive effects of literacy, utilizes Donald Davidson's theory of quotation (See 2001b, chapter 6) to make a similar argument (Olson

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counter-intuitive arguments, arguments we are nonetheless tamed to accept. It is interesting to point out that writing and animal domestication arose around the same time, following the invention of agriculture (the domestication of plants). The original written scripts were based on agricultural commodities.

[4] For general background see Schribner and Cole (1981), Olson and Astington (1990), Olson (1994), Mithen (1999), Donald (1991, 1999, 2001, Sperber (2002), O'hara (2002), and Whitehouse (2002). See also Read et. al. (1986) who indicate that alphabetic literacy contributes to the ability to manipulate language at the level of phonemic segments.

[5] The limitations placed on agency and intentionality in the polemic prelude a "Western" scientific orientation. See Sinclair (2002, 179), who argues the scientific method is predicated upon taking phenomena as mindless. See also Davidson (2001c, 128) who makes the same argument about physics. The Biblical polemic against graven images thus has a similar psychological orientation as the polemic against divination (see Leviticus 26:1, Psalm 115: 4-5). Images and icons are competing forms of representational media. For relevant work on images and religion, see Winter (1992), Gell (1999) and Goody (2004, 54).

2001, 245). He finds that writing tends to lead to reflexivity about the semantic properties of communication, and linguistic content in particular. Writing is "related to the reflexive property of speech exploited in quotation," (247) which is a form of metarepresentation that disembeds utterances from their normal context. Quoting an utterance or proposition, like *entertaining* a proposition, requires "decoupling". This level of metarepresentation has been tied to the "Theory of Mind" module in cognitive studies of communication and to Trevarthen's "secondary intersubjectivity," signaled first in children by the ability to pass the false belief task and pretend play.[6] Olson's point is that *writing* is implicitly in this category of semantic metarepresentation.

With texts we find new kinds of entities that are subject to human mentalizing abilities. These second order artifacts are unique to natural history because they do in fact "say something", however they are still somewhat foreign to our analog evolutionarily adapted cognitive folk systems (Pyysiainen 1999). Literacy thus tends to "enhance" or change the metalinguistic abilities, such as decoupling, as a central feature of religion. As Boyer (2001, 131) notes, "supernatural concepts are just one consequence of the human capacity for decoupling representations." It should be no surprise then that literacy would have a strong effect on religion.

In light of and in addition to these consequences, I argue that literacy has a measurable effect on folk systems, our default capacities for generating causal theories about complex phenomena (see Sperber 1996ab; Sperber and Hirschfeld 1999; Atran 2002, 2005). Examples of such systems are folk (or "naïve") physics, which is our default ability to theorize and predict the movement and integrity of objects in space, and folk biology, our inherent capacity to generate biological principles (such as life) and to divide the world into biological categories. The concern of this paper is the domain of folk psychology often termed "theory of mind" (or mentalizing), which is the ability to attribute intentionality, desire, belief, and other propositional attitudes to people we wish to interpret (see Davies and Stone 1995; Caruthers and Smith 1996; Gopnik and Meltzoff 1997). To restate then, my hypothesis is that the polemic against divination is a *domestication of folk psychology* in the sense that writing subjects mentalizing tendencies to second order reflection and systemization.[7]

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[6] See Boyer (2001, 129ff.) for his discussion of decoupling. For more on metarepresentation, see Sperber (2000). For secondary intersubjectivity, see Trevarthen (1979, 1983) and Tomasello (1999).

[7] A word must be said about the relation between my argument and Whitehouse's cognitive theory of religion, which argues for two basic forms of religion, the imagistic and the doctrinal that emerge depending on the manner in which religious experiences are encoded in episodic or semantic memory respectively. Whitehouse addresses writing in Whitehouse (2004, 228), where he says that the Goody/Boyer position (see Goody 2004 and Boyer 2001, 314ff.) sees writing as the *cause* of the emergence of new doctrinal forms of religion in the ancient world. In contrast, Whitehouse thinks that the "massive increase in the scale and frequency of agricultural rituals, occasioned by major technological and demographic changes" possibly "triggered the earliest emergence of routinized orthodoxies." He even thinks this new form of ritual "may have been a major stimulus for the development of writing systems, rather than the other way around" and he notes support for this from two of the chapters in Whitehouse (2004). Whitehouse ends his summary with some apologetics about the conclusions in these chapters being "drawn tentatively on the basis of fragmentary data." (229) I do not wish to get caught up in debates about whether literacy is necessary for the doctrinal mode. Even if we had more than scant evidence about Biblical period ritual, the chicken or egg question about literacy and routinized forms of religion would not be very interesting. The fact is that we cannot understand literacy or writing as distinct from other social forms and practices; the massive increase in scale and frequency, major technological changes, demographic changes, and writing systems came together and cannot be clearly dissociated for the time

Wilson and Sperber's *relevance theory* and Davidson's *radical interpretation*, two of the most discussed recent theories of communication, give us additional insight into the polemic because they are grounded in the most up to date cognitive science and philosophy of language, at the same time that they take seriously the irreducibility of folk systems. The first part of this paper presents some background about the production of scrolls and the effects of literacy. I then use the communication theories of Wilson, Sperber, and Davidson to generate five communicative or mentalizing principles that I argue change in the context of robust literacy. I propose that the polemic against divination must be understood in light of these changes.

Prophecy is a form of divination. In the Hebrew Bible however, 'prophecy', that is communication with one superhuman agent in particular, probably called Yahweh or not called at all, was acceptable, while divination was subject to polemics. As a literary device, the polemic needs to be explained in the intellectual terms in which it is presented. The Hebrew Bible, or at least its final redaction, is the production of a small group of elite "scribes" or secretaries who were part of a much larger educated society of the ancient Near East.[8] The polemic did not refer to any program for social action, but was rather an intellectual position taken up by a powerless segment of society, a group of very religious exiled Judeans educated in the Babylonian university system.

This system was the original model for European educational system (Kramer 1963), a system designed to produce a bureaucratic "class" of managers. Archaeologist David Schloen has recently argued that it was not until the 1st millennium BCE that states in the Near East can be regarded as Weber's "impersonal bureaucratic state". Schloen follows Karl Jaspers use of the term "Axial Age… for the period of the emergence of more rationalized regimes in the first millennium bce." (52) He correlates this shift with the shift to "monotheistic faith" as an elective affinity, postulating that the age experienced "a fundamental shift in human conceptions of social order, evident in religious and philosophical literature of the period, especially that of ancient Greece and Israel." The shift was also "reflected in and dialectically influenced by changing material conditions, in the form of new economic relationships (including a monetary economy) and the physical reorganization of social interaction that we can detect archaeologically in changing settlement patterns…" (64) The key factor in the shift, according to Weber and Schloen, is the "rationalization" of social life, "a phenomenon that was ultimately rooted in a new awareness of the gulf between the transcendent and mundane spheres of reality."[9]

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period in question. We would do better to examine the actual cognitive implications of literacy on religion, precisely what I aim to do. Because a full treatment of Whitehouse's important theory would distract from that task, I do not pursue it presently. I should note my serious doubts about a theory that sees two distinct "organizing principles of religious experience," as if there is something called "religious experience" and as if "experience" is something that can be organized, like a broom closet or a library (see Davidson 1984b).

[8] Note that this attempt to locate the group responsible for the redaction of the Hebrew Bible is conjecture; however it does represent a good guess based on both Biblical representations and comparative evidence (Niels Peter Lemche, personal communication, September 2005). This conjecture is consonant with the representation of events in the Biblical text, for example in Ezra, Nehemiah, and the latter prophets. For recent research on canon criticism, see (Lee and Sanders 2002).

[9] See Schloen (2001, 64). Authority requires legitimation; Weber's "sociology of domination" posed three ideal types of legitimation: 1) legal rational, 2) traditional, and 3) charismatic. The first characterizes rational bureaucracies which entail systems of abstract rules and differentiate between public and private.

But this new bureaucratic tradition was largely subservient to royal and priestly authority. The scroll tradition that became the Hebrew Bible was thus an exceptional occurrence because much of it comes from outside these forms of authority. Due to a series of historical contingencies, most notably that a few Judeans were educated in that advanced Babylonian system, for the first time a "history" of losers could be *written*, and thereby preserved.[10] Israel was, after all, marked almost solely by its failures and its tragedies.

The polemic against divination did not claim divination was an illusion, but that it was powerless, that it theorized agents that had no purpose of their own, and thus were useless as guides to prediction or control. In the prophetic literature, other gods, their "idols", and their representatives are regarded as "empty" and "false", for example in 2 Kings 17:15 "…they went after the empty ones and became empty…" (see also Psalm 31:6-7, 97:7) The Biblical tendency to play with language in and around other gods is notorious and exemplifies a similar tendency to limit agency and intentionality (for example in Exodus 10:10; see also Good 1965). The prophets are especially fixated on "idols" (see Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah).

Garr (2003) makes a similar argument about the Priestly theology in the Hebrew Bible. Based on his analysis of the use of first person plural verb forms to describe Yahweh's actions in the text, Garr argues that the Priestly theology recognized superhuman agents other than Yahweh (YHVH), but that these agents had no intentions, or real agency, independent of him. Similarly, the polemic against divination represents a religious reflection on communication and agency. Biblical prophecy and divination were and continue to be juxtaposed as competing theories of communication with gods.

Major Problems:

There are four major problems with my argument as a whole. The first is that it is not immediately obvious why some very abstract theories of communication should be able to tell us anything significant about an ancient polemic. There is far more theoretical machinery than necessary to account for the historical question. The second is that the historical picture above might be read to look like an evolutionary story about consciousness. Third, written language appeared long before the polemics of the 2nd temple period (after the 5th century BCE) so it could not be a precipitating factor. Fourth,

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Schloen finds in the Axial age the right conditions for formal rationality to become socially effective on a wide scale and able to endure over time. He regards "Jewish monotheism" and Greek philosophy as paradigmatic examples of the trend toward formal rationalization. In terms of the former, he thinks that the earlier "polytheistic" values are concentrated, demythologized, or "disenchanted" so it became possible to "imagine universal formal principles that govern the relationship between God and humanity as a whole, with less regard to one's substantive position within the hierarchy." (91) There is thus much more focus on the relation between particular individuals and gods, with corresponding changes in ethics according to "increasingly egalitarian and universalizing principles." Schloen and Weber see rationalization opening up the problem of salvation. This is when the "mundane" fails to live up to the "transcendent". Schloen characterizes this as a conflict between utopian rationalization and traditional ideology. The former relies on a "credibility gap" between claims of legitimacy on the part of those in authority, and the belief in legitimacy; the two rarely correspond (95).

[10] For the Biblical version of this story see especially the memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, which are generally thought to have been composed between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE in Judea. See also Haggai, Zechariah, and Isaiah 40–66.

it may be argued that there is only a circumstantial relation between the polemic against divination and the effects of literacy.

These problems require response, more perhaps than space permits. Since the hypothesis is that a shift in communicative technology is a major factor that explains the polemic against divination, it is paramount that we begin the argument with a proper theory of communication. By comparing two of the best we have, I think this puts us on the proper theoretical starting point to address the shift. There is a growing body of literature that recognizes the implications of these theories of communication for the study of texts.[11]

The shift was not a one time event, and was far from simple. What I refer to as the shift should be understood as the formation of a new bureaucratic educated class in the "Axial age" and the corresponding institutions that supported it (such as libraries, archives, tax offices, and universities; see Pearce 1995; Brosius 2003). All religions underwent significant changes in this period. It is due to another series of contingencies, most notably that the literature of the Hebrew Bible was taken up by early Christians, that we in the West and now the world, have placed so much interest and reflection in the body of literature of these Judean intellectuals. This is not therefore an evolutionary shift in consciousness nor is it the end of the golden age of archaic myth making. But this era does begin a religious and intellectual preoccupation with written texts. And it is from the standpoint of this preoccupation that most of our understanding of the ancient world is based.

The Hebrew Bible is an expression of a form of intellectual homelessness which has come to define the modern condition. It is an example of a group of intellectuals coming to some collective realization of themselves in light of their difference with surrounding people. From the Babylonian (or Egyptian) perspective, these elite Judeans were brought from the barbarian periphery of their empire to be enlightened in their high culture. So it was a combination of an exilic mentality and a secretarial education in the heart of the civilized world – an original divided consciousness – that made the form of literature they produced distinctive. It is these factors that precipitated specific polemics in the text.[12]

As far as the fourth problem is concerned, while it may be true that this hypothesis is conjectural, I find there is direct evidence of a Deuteronomic (which is especially associated with scribal-wisdom and Pharisaic traditions) preoccupation with prophecy in contrast to divination, an increasing theology of "the word" (*davar*), and a central place given to the concept of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible (see Levy 2006). The concept of prophecy in the Hebrew Bible is indeed the reflection on written language to which I refer.

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[11] For relevance, see especially Ramos (1998, 331) and Clark (1987, 1996). For Davidson, see Dasenbrock (1993)

[12] "Monotheism," an intellectual monism applied to superhuman agents, was well in circulation in a number of places at this time. This was not what made this community distinctive, but rather the inscription of their literature on scrolls, a literature which compelled future generations to copy, preserve, and distribute it. Though the temple in Jerusalem was surely something they could not ignore, it was seemingly more trouble than it was worth, and the religion of the temple was already a minor concern for these "proto-Jews". Rather, they instituted the "reading" of their scrolls as their primary mode of worship.

"Scraps to Scrolls":

Divination is a form of technologically distributed cognition. Distributed cognition is the now generally accepted idea that "cognitive processes are… distributed across internal and external structures – across people, artifacts, space and time."[13] That is, "the artifacts and external resources with which we interact are a fundamental part of the cognitive system itself." (O'hara 2002, 272) By the first millennium BCE writing had sufficiently established itself as alternative form of distributed cognition. Just as digital technology is today, writing was (and still is) an emergent technology that changed the way in which some groups thought through certain problems.[14] Though we obviously have no ethnographic evidence about the process that brought together the Hebrew Bible, we can be sure that is was some *process* in distributed cognition.[15]

Philip Davies (2000) gives additional circumstantial support to this argument. Davies provides a five stage historical conjecture of the production of the prophetic books.[16] The conjecture is useful primarily to think about the process and materials of

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[13] For a good summary of the literature on writing and distributed cognition, see O'hara (2002). O'hara argues that writing should be understood as a form of "hybrid" problem solving. He inquires into "how the material properties of artifacts cause cognitive processes to be distributed in beneficial or problematic ways," (272) examining four techniques: shifting attention across source materials and the composition document, spatial layout, annotation, and concurrent use of paper and computer documents (295-298). He thus argues for writing as a form of distributed cognition" where "the relationship between internal and external structures is more than simply a re-representing of the external world in internally encoded models. Rather, it involves the ways in which we can dynamically configure these external resources and artifacts to coordinate with memory, attention and to facilitate perception, simplify choice and minimize internal computation." (271) The configuration of the external environment, "then, is thus very much dependent upon the material properties of the environment and the interactional properties they afford particular actors..." (272) See also Hutchins (1995) who describes the distribution of cognition in navigation. The most prominent philosopher to use this approach is Dennett; see for example Dennett's discussion with Clark on writing as a form of distributed or extended cognition in Dahlbom (1995). See also Haas (1996). This literature encourages yet another form of Biblical Criticism I hereby term "Cognitive Criticism."

[14] In making this assertion we should be sure to heed Christina Haas's (1996) warning that "the materiality of writing is the central fact of literacy." (3) In her study of the effects of computer technology in the writing process, she notes that this materiality includes the way that the technology implicates our bodies: "changing the technologies of writing has profound implications, at least in part, because different technologies are materially configured in profoundly different ways. That is, different writing technologies set up radically different spatial, tactile, visual, and even temporal relations between the writer's material body and his or her material text." (226) She notes further that, "for the most part, material concerns have remained outside the realm of consideration of writing research possibly due to the profound distrust of the bodily within scholarly inquiry and within culture at large." To the extent possible, research on the Hebrew Bible should concern itself with the details of material production process of scrolls in Iron Age Palestine and later. Tov's work is perhaps closest to this, though even he is not specific enough about the actual bodies, habits, practices, procedures, and materials of production. Tov believes his book on scribal practices (2004) is the closest to meeting these requirements (personal communication), however, it does not do so with the kind of specificity required above.

[15] Ethnographic research into scribal communities and professionalization are useful as parallels to provide context for my argument. See for example Goody (1968, 1983), Stock (1983), Clanchy (1993), Florida (1995), Pearch (1995), Nissinen (2000), Brosius (2003). The best studies on the theme of scribal practice in ancient Judea are Jamieson-Drake (1991), and Niditch (1996), Davies (1998), Schams (1998), Fitzpatrick-McKinley (1999), and Tov (2004).

[16] He does so with some provisos, for "the phenomenon of 'prophecy' in ancient Israel and Judah is not essentially a social one, but a literary one: what makes the case of these societies unique is that they produced 'prophetic' scrolls." (66)

production. Davies envisions a radically close relation between "prophetism and scribalism" due to the nature of the archival process. The composition of the Hebrew Bible, or at least its redaction, was a process of thinking things through with scrolls.

Briefly, he argues that this production (or reflection) was a five stage process. Based on evidence from Mari, Uruk, and Assyria, Davies argues that the initial stage of the process begins either with the report of an oral pronouncement or with a literary pronouncement, such as the letter portrayed in 2 Chr 21:12, that finds its way into a temple or royal archive. Regardless of the mode by which a letter or report came to its recipient, in the second stage it was likely filed, shelved, or boxed in an archive according to the name of the sender. As letters were gathered associated with different names, the file would grow. At some stage, letters, reports, and larger scrolls may have been grouped according to other themes. A corpus begins to build, and should a file require copying, it is likely that they would be copied onto a single piece of leather. Davies thus argues that an "archiving mentality" was important to the production process, especially to the extent that it attached particular files to particular names.[17]

After the archival stage comes the compositional stage. This stage concerns subsequent copying and the addition of elements of "detail, expansion, or structural organization." (75) According to Davies, the compositional stage is in turn made up of three stages. In the first, we find copying, iteration, and expansion.

However, this stage is not enough to explain the prophetic scrolls. Between this stage and the final stage when prophetic texts are "studied along with law and proverbs by the educated person in the 2nd century BCE," (75) we have a stage in which "the idea of 'prophecy'" is produced "as an institution of divine guidance of national history." (77) That is, we find "various processes of 'historicization' within these 'prophetic' collections." Historical contextualization does not come at the beginning of the process, but towards the end.[18]

The fourth stage concerns "the development of a historiographical corpus," which then served as the historical backdrop for the prophetic compositions. The fifth stage is the last in the production process when prophetic scrolls were held in enough intellectual and religious esteem to be canonized by the outset of the Common Era.

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[17] However, Davies cautions that this exact procedure is "not intended to account for the origins of all the 'prophetic' books" though it does explain some of their incoherence. Rather, Davies suggests this "only as an evolutionary stage." In this model, "material is grouped into single scrolls for convenience and is intended to be consulted or retrieved or scanned by the curious – if intended to be read at all." (75)

[18] Davies adds further caution: that it is a mistake to "assume that the process of production is driven by a consistent theological, ideological, or literary purpose." (78) This should perhaps be obvious since the production process, on most accounts, spans 5 to 10 centuries, and thus hundreds or thousands of individuals' particular purposes. Despite this warning, Davies goes on to suggest some possible motivations for the composition of prophecy; namely, prophecy as social critique, in which a particular scribe could couch his criticism in the words of older prophets. Davies argues that many of the prophetic books are exploring the question of the world order in light of a colonial experience: "In much of the 'prophetic' literature one can detect the kind of interest in the political implications of a colonial monotheism that fits perhaps better with the scribes employed by the administrative center, be that the colonial governor's or the high priest's, than with intermediaries. Among the motives for the generation of the material in the prophetic scrolls – and perhaps for the editing of these scrolls – may lie an intellectual agenda, allied to historiography." (78)

Effects of literacy:

Some digression into empirical research on the psychological effects of literacy is necessary in order to temper the conjectural statements above. The best recent example of such studies is Schribner and Cole's (1981) groundbreaking study of the psychological effects of literacy among the Vai people of Liberia, Africa. These authors both counter the grand theorizing of a previous generation of scholars of literacy[19] such as Goody (1977), Ong (1990), and Havelock (1982), at the same time that they provide evidence of the effects of specific literary practices. Their research led them to question the usefulness of the idea of "literacy in general." They found no significant cognitive difference between literates and illiterates. They thus questioned the grand dichotomy of literacy and its supposed historical consequences.[20]

However they did find four major consequences of the literacy in their research (244): reading and writing was associated with skills in (1) integrating syllables of spoken Vai into meaningful sentences (auditory integration task); (2) using graphic symbols to represent language; (3) using language as a means of instruction; (4) and talking about correct Vai speech. More generally then, literacy contributes to one's ability to communicate about and reflect on her language.

Schribner and Cole's research gives the kind of specificity we need when talking about the psychological effects of literacy, but a few points of friction emerge with my argument. First, these researchers are interested in *individual* cognitive effects of literacy. This is a problem because the effects of literacy should be looked for at a cultural level, or at the very least *in terms of communicative cognitive principles such as the ones outlined in this paper* (below). Second, they note that they did not research the

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[19] For the best review of this literature, see Collins (1995)

[20] More particularly their study sought to differentiate between the cognitive effects of *schooling* and the effects of literacy. In order to do so they had to find a population in which reading and writing of a script were not taught in school; they found this to be the case among the Vai. Contrary to most scholars on the subject at the time, they showed that among the Vai literacy does not necessarily lead to metalinguistic knowledge, and does not enhance one's ability for abstract thought. Literacy also does not necessarily dispel nominal realism, the idea that words and things have an intrinsic, non-arbitrary connection (thought to be found among "the primitives"). In other words, nonschooled literacy among the Vai, "does not produce general cognitive effects." However, they did find that "there are several literacy-specific effects on certain task specific skills." (132) These include what I call greater propensity to "reflect" on language. This follows straightforwardly that "deliberate composition … will increase formal understanding of [one's] language," such as grammar. Schribner and Cole found no difference in the identification of grammatical errors among literates and nonliterates, but a significant difference in their ability to explain these differences (152). They also found that, as problem-solving activities, reading and writing affect speech performance; for example a significant and systematic increase in the use of indefinite forms among literates. They argue that this is due to the fact that writing is more general, and uses less features of immediate reference. (188) They also found that literacy improves the ability to provide important communicative information because writing places greater demands on this skill. In other words, writing "may improve instructional communication… not so much by improving ability to take the listener's perspective, but in equipping a person with techniques to meet the informational demands in a particular communicative situation." (218) Aside from these conclusions they found "little support for speculations that literacy is a pre-condition or prime cause for an understanding of language as an object." (157) Specifically, literates did not have a better grasp of metalinguistic knowledge such as the relations between propositions or words (156). Of course, *schooling* does have these effects across the board. Schribner and Cole argue for a conception of literacy as a practice and a tool (*ala* Dennett): "literacy is not simply knowing how to read and write a particular script but applying this knowledge for specific purposes in specific contexts of use." (236).

effects of "advanced literary practices" on professional scribes or scholars. They suggest that if they had they would find even greater generalizing and critical abilities, and I concur (245). Third, my argument focuses on the effects of literacy in a specific social and historical environment. Ideally this argument should be expanded to explore the effects of *schooling* (Davies 1998), but for now it is limited to literacy because we *know*, *ipso facto*, that the Hebrew Bible is a result of literary practice, while schooling is likely but unsubstantiated.

It is within this context of the production process of scrolls (Davies) and the effects of literacy in 2nd temple era Judea (Schribner and Cole) that we should locate the polemic against divination.[21] However, all the scholars presented thus far have lacked a robust theory of communication. A comparison of Davidson's theory (DT, for short) and Wilson and Sperber's theory ("Relevance theory," RT for short) will provide the necessary theoretical foundation from which to evaluate the above arguments. I first provide a dense, technical summary of each theory, and then I compare them. Those readers interested in the details of the theories should consult the bibliography provided. Those readers more interested in the application of the comparison than the details of the theories should skip the next two sections.

Relevance Theory:

In RT communicators maximize relevance, which is the ratio of deriving (positive) contextual implications or effects with the ever-increasing cost of processing (Wilson and Sperber 1995, 76).[22] Wilson and Sperber argue that communication only occurs because of the expectation of some reward on the part of communicators, and also that human beings "automatically aim at the most efficient information processing possible" (49). The reward, according to their theory, is information made manifest by relevance criteria.

A hearer will consider possible interpretations "in order of their accessibility (that is, follow a path of least effort) and… stop as soon as he reaches one that satisfies his expectation of relevance." (Carston and Powell 2006, 2) Relevance is explained in evolutionary terms, for the claim that humans are geared towards maximizing relevance is the "claim that we are designed to look for as many cognitive effects as possible for as little processing effort as possible. The idea is that, as a result of constant selection pressure towards increasing cognitive efficiency, we have evolved procedures to pick out potentially relevant inputs and to process them in the most cost-effective way..." (Carston and Powell, 1-2)

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[21] Schribner and Cole rightly note that cognitive skills, "no less than perceptual or motor or linguistic skills, are intimately bound up with the nature of the practices that require them. Thus, in order to identify the consequences of literacy, we need to consider the specific characteristics of specific practices. And, in order to conduct such an analysis, we need to understand the larger social system that generates certain kinds of practices (and not others) and poses particular tasks for these practices (and not others). From this perspective, inquiries into the cognitive consequences of literacy are inquiries into impact of socially organized practices in other domains (trade, agriculture) on practices involving writing (keeping lists or sales, exchanging goods by letter)." (237) Since we lack most, if not all, the evidence of such practices in the Biblical case, the argument proceeds with greater generality and comparative abstraction concerning the effects of literacy.

[22] For a good summary of RT and its initial developments see (Ramos, 1998)

Three crucial concepts in the theory of relevance are *principle of relevance, manifestness, and ostension*. In its modified form, the principle of relevance is actually two principles, a cognitive principle where "human cognition tends to be geared to the maximization of relevance" and a communicative sense where "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance." (Ramos, 18)

The degree to which something is manifest, for Wilson and Sperber, is the degree to which it is perceptible, inferable, or assumed (Sperber and Wilson, 39). An individual's total cognitive environment is all the "facts" manifest to him consciously or otherwise. That is, all the facts he is aware of and *capable of becoming* aware of. When "the same facts and assumptions" are manifest in the cognitive environments of two different people, the environments intersect. The total shared cognitive environment is the intersection of their two total cognitive environments. "In a mutual cognitive environment, every manifest assumption is what [they] call *mutually manifest*"; (42) that is, every manifest assumption is itself manifest. Communication, on their reading, is thus a relevance oriented attempt to alter a mutual cognitive environment, where the intention to communicate is itself manifest.

Wilson and Sperber call behavior that makes manifest an intention to make something manifest ostension (49): "just as an assertion comes with a tacit guarantee of truth, so ostension comes with a tacit guarantee of relevance." (49) This guarantee makes it possible for interpreters to select from a set of "newly manifest assumptions" those that "have been made intentionally manifest" by a speaker (50). For Wilson and Sperber two intentions, or what they call "layers of information," (50) are thus particularly important: a communicative intention to draw attention to oneself in order "to make her informative intention mutually manifest," (163) and an informative intention to draw someone's attention to some thing, to make "manifest to her audience a set of assumptions {I}." (155)

Wilson and Sperber think that the capacity to understand utterances is a different, though perhaps overlapping modality, than the general ability to attribute intentions on the basis of purposive behavior. The first reason for this is that relevance directed communication involves "four levels of metarepresentation while in understanding ordinary actions a single level of intention attribution is usually sufficient." For RT communication the hearer has to recognize that the speaker (1) intends him to (2) believe that she (3) intends him to (4) believe a certain set of propositions (Sperber 1994; Sperber 2000; Carsten and Powell, 15)

Second, unlike basic intention recognition in which the desired effect is distinct from the intention, in relevance communication "the desired effect just is the recognition of the communicator's intention: 'hearers cannot *first* identify a desirable effect of the utterance and *then* infer that the speaker's intention was precisely to achieve this effect' (Wilson 2003, 116)." That is, the desired effect is itself the recognition of an intention or set of intentions {I}.

Davidson's Theory:

In order to simplify Davidson's complex system, for my purposes here I will focus on Davidson's notions of *first meaning, charity, and radical interpretation* as they compare to RT notions above. Charity is a necessary principle in communication for Davidson. It requires us to read in to our conversation partner a massive degree of

rationality. If we did not do so, there would be no chance we could understand her, and therefore no chance we could attribute thoughts to her. For Davidson the very process of arriving at meaning is one of mapping truth conditions (truths and falsities), that is, developing a theory of truth for that person based on their patterns of assent and dissent. If there were no pattern, there would be no meaning. Charity is both the principle of the pattern (as the principle of coherence) and the "constant held across contexts of observation" (as the principle of correspondence) in terms of the salient distal stimuli (Davidson 1983; Davidson 1999; Brink 2004, 191).[23]

First meaning is a speaker's intention to utter words that a hearer will intepret in a certain way (Davidson 1986; Glock 2003, 258). Thus, it is an intention to induce certain beliefs in the hearer, beliefs about what the speaker believes. It is important to remember in this context that for Davidson, "a belief is not a relation to either a proposition or a sentence, but the 'modification of a person', and more specifically, a dispositional mental state."[24] (Glock, 266)

Whereas Wilson and Sperber's theory depends on the idea of cognitive efficiency, Davidson's depends on the idea of iteration. Interpretation must rest on the possession of a theory because it is based on a finite vocabulary, and a finite grammar. Davidson points out that the theory could be conceived of as "a machine which, when fed an arbitrary utterance (and certain parameters provided by the circumstances of the utterance), produces an interpretation" (Davidson 1986, 468) Davidson favors a Tarski-style machine (Tarski 1944), which "provides a recursive characterization of the truth-conditions of all possible utterances of a speaker." However, this theory need not be part of the "propositional knowledge" of an interpreter, "nor are they claims about the details of the inner working of some part of the brain." Unlike RT, Davidson's theory is not internal but descriptive, its purpose is rather "to give a satisfactory description of the competence of the interpreter." (Davidson 1986, 469)

At any moment in communication communicators have theories about one another that have been "adjusted to the evidence so far available to him: knowledge of character, dress, role, sex of the speaker, and whatever else has been gained by observing the speaker's behavior, linguistic or otherwise." Part of the communicator's theory includes all of these manifest facts about the communicative situation. Davidson calls this the *prior* theory.

From the speaker's perspective, he must intend to speak in just the way he intends to be interpreted. That is, the speaker has certain beliefs about the *prior* theory that his interpreter takes to the communicative interaction. Even if the speaker wishes to deceive, he must do so holding beliefs about his interpreter's prior theory.

Both speaker and interpreter also have what Davidson calls an *ad hoc* "passing theory" in addition to the prior theory. When the speaker speaks, the interpreter then

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[23] Brink notes that for Davidson (1999) perceptual saliency is a contextual feature "connected to how much effort it takes to perceive an item. The most salient features are the ones that can be picked up with the least effort. Usually these are the ones that contrast against our expectations." (Brink, 2004, 191)

[24] Thus, as Glock glosses Davidson, "in talking about the beliefs of people we no more need to suppose that 'there are such entities as beliefs' than in talking about weights of objects we need suppose that there are weights for objects to have. To say that x weighs 10kg is to relate x not to 'a weight', but to other material objects, according to one of their properties. Similarly, talking about beliefs is a way 'to keep track of the relevant properties of and relations among the various psychological states' of people, for the purpose of explaining their behavior." (Glock, 266)

"alters his theory… revising part interpretations of particular utterance in light of new evidence." (471) The prior theory is the theory a speaker has about the way he thinks his words will be interpreted, while the passing theory is the theory the speaker intends the interpreter to use. The hearer also has his own prior and passing theories. The prior theory is his preparedness for interpreting the speaker, while the passing theory is the actual theory that does so.

For communication to be successful only the passing theory must be shared: "for the passing theory is the one the interpreter actually uses to interpret an utterance, and it is the theory the speaker intends the interpreter to use." Communication is successful to the extent that passing theories are shared.

The basis of Davidson's theory of communication is the thought-experiment of radical interpretation in which we are meant to imagine how communication gets off the ground between two communicators who do not share the same language. Davidson thinks the guiding process is that of "triangulation," where the content of the communicative interaction will be provided by the convergences of lines of sight or causes. The triangle consists of two people and a shared world. The causes of linguistic content are those macroscopic features of the world, objects, and their relation in time as events, which we are programmed to find interesting. Interpretation will proceed by an ongoing coordination through the development of passing theories from prior theories within the interpretive triangle. Thus what anchors thought in the world is the joint focus of attention on objects and events.[25]

Comparison of Theories:

Both theories try to explain communication. Davidson does so formally and semantically while Wilson and Sperber do so in psychological and cognitive terms. Both recognize that a correct interpretation is arrived at through "the Gricean condition that the speaker intends the interpreter to arrive at the right sort of truth conditions through the interpreter's recognition of the speaker's intention to be so interpreted." (Davidson 2001c, 112) Both theories, like Grice, rely on the ideal case of communication where something like an informative intention and a communicative intention are common between speaker and hearer.

Both theories propose that communicators construct sets or theories that change as communication goes along. Wilson and Sperber's shared cognitive environment and Davidson's shared passing theories thus do similar work, and combining the two would seem to give us a full bodied theory of communication.

One major difference is that Davidson relies on a holistic and formal conception of a theory. This allows him to pose a different basis for communicative content, for the content is derived from the place of sentences or propositions in theories (i.e. in languages). In Wilson and Sperber's case, though they are more secure about the cost-benefits of cognition, there is less security when it comes to the content of communication. Another major difference is that for Davidson the passing theory would seem to be almost entirely *ad hoc*, while Wilson and Sperber are against Grice's maxims

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[25] It is best to read Davidson for oneself. For charity and radical interpretation see Davidson (1973), for first meaning see Davidson (1978 and 1986), for triangulation see Davidson (1984a), for a unified picture see Davidson (1991). There is also a large secondary literature, see http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/davidson/.

because they appear *ad hoc* (Sperber and Wilson, 36), and instead they postulate causal mechanisms, or cognitive constraints to explain communication.[26]

Comparison of the two theories finds a few points of overlap, suggesting five interrelated concepts which should serve as basic terms for any theory of communication: intention, interest, content, attention, and pattern recognition. Perhaps we can equate these theoretical terms with the modules of the communication noted by autism specialist Simon Baron-Cohen. In Baron-Cohen (1995), an essay on autism and theory of mind, Baron-Cohen describes four independent developmental mechanisms that allow for "mindreading," or the ability for unimpaired adult human to attribute and predict the mental states of others. The first is the *Intentionality Detector*, which is an amodal "perceptual device that interprets motion stimuli in terms of the primitive volitional states of goal and desire." (32) We automatically tend to interpret an object's movement in space terms of goal and desire. That is, we take the object to have a motivation and a goal.

The second mechanism that allows for mindreading is the *Eye-direction Detector*, which 1) detects the presence of eyes or eye-like stimuli, 2) computes whether eyes are directed toward it or toward something else, and 3) infers from its own case that if another organism's eyes are directed at something then that organism sees that thing (38-39). The third mechanism, the *Shared Attention Mechanism* builds "triadic representations" which specify the relations between three objects (agent, self, object or agent, self, agent, etc…). The fourth or *Theory of Mind Mechanism* adds (1) "epistemic mental states," the full range of propositional attitudes (such as pretending, thinking, knowing, believing, etc…) to the mix and (2) a way of tying volitional, perceptual, and epistemic mental-state concepts together by turning the mentalistic knowledge into a useful theory. Thus the *Theory of Mind Mechanism* receives inputs from the *Intentionality Detector* and *Eye Direction Detector* and integrates them into a useful theory.[27] In terms of the communicative concepts derived from the comparison of DT and RT, perhaps intention and interest develop with the *Intentionality Detector*, content with the *Eye Direction Detector*, attention with the *Shared Attention Mechanism*, and pattern recognition with the *Theory of Mind Mechanism* (See Brink 2004 and Sinclair 2002, 179).

To reiterate, the content of communication is provided in part by reference to these basic concepts. Communication takes advantage of biological mechanisms for drawing, following, and sharing attention. The relevance notion of manifestness and Davidson's notion of first meaning both rely on the idea that linguistic communication occurs by directing attention jointly towards theories or sets of assumptions. In order to communicate one must also draw attention to the real or mimicked intention to communicate. Intentional behavior is goal directed and thus requires one to read in objects of desire.

Both theories recognize that interest can serve as the frame for sets of assumptions of theories. That is, the springs of desire (and other propositional attitudes)

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[26] Though Carston (2002) disagrees.

[27] Since pattern recognition is a low level cognitive device, perhaps the *Theory of Mind Mechanism* should be thought of as the recognition of patterns of beliefs and desires (or any 'triadic' propositional attitude).

cannot be extricated from one's standards of truth.[28] They are in fact its very substance, in the sense that desire (what things are desired, what propositions are desired) too is a theoretical entity that serves to account for people's (including one's own) behavior. Disagreement about the objects of desire is only possible against the theoretical background discussed above.

For Wilson and Sperber content is given by the "code," by a lexical or memory representation in the brain and by the relevance based context. In contrast, Davidson sees triangulation as the primary basis for content. Finally, both theories rely on the generation of theories based on patterns of belief and motivated actions.

Application to Divination:

Divination is a form of mind reading (Gallese and Goldman 1998) of the kind discussed by cognitive scientists for many years now. Though there may be important differences, both mechanistic and interpretive divination rely on the attribution of intentionality and agency.[29] The description of a divination that Abbink (1993, 711ff.) observed among the Me'en in East Africa will serve as a paradigmatic case for the argument to follow. In this case, a woman collapsed in her hut and could neither move nor speak. After trying a number of solutions an "expert in the art of intestine reading," named Onyai, was finally called. The husband of the woman procured a black and white goat for the reading. Then,

> water from a gourd container was drunk by Berguwa, the husband, and sprayed over the goat. The remaining water was then poured out over the left hand of Berguwa, which was held above the part of the goat where the intestines are located. Then he quickly slit the throat of the animal. The blood was caught in a calabash container, to be used later. The intestines were then taken out by Onyai and carefully spread out on the grass, the top part directed toward the Omo valley (where the Me'en originated)… The reading began. Although Onyai was the person responsible for the proper reading, the interpretation of what the entrails might say was a collective, dialogic one: Onyai made a suggestion, to which the other male adults present responded. (712)

The reading then proceeded with Onyai pointing out features of the intestine, such as the presence of spots of various colors, and asking questions of the audience (712). Just as written language is anchored in the physical properties of scripts and letters, divinatory discourse "and its emergent meaning" are anchored "in the *regular* physical properties of the entrails: spots on parts like the jejunum, the ileum, the caecum, on the mucous membrane or the colon ascendens… and whether shades such as red, yellow or black always mean something. Irregular lines and clots in the blood-vessels… and connecting parts… are similarly examined for clues of relevance." (710) Though "no clear or conclusive interpretation was made by Onyai" Abbink suggest that "this reading

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[28] Though Davidson is concerned primarily with belief, very early on he pointed out that the indeterminacy between meaning and belief is related to the indeterminacy between belief and decision. While semantics involves truth as a function of both meaning and belief, decision theory involves preference as a function of beliefs and desires. In this light he has called for a "unified theory of meaning and action" which involves a "heightened indeterminacy due to interdependence of meaning, belief, and valuing" (Hahn, 1999, 530).

[29] The basis of my understanding of divination comes from Garfinkel (1984), Tambiah (1990), Zeitlyn (1990), Abbink (1993), Cryer (1994), and Tedlock (2001).

session was effective and got its sobering message across" – that the woman would die – since "through his displacement strategy Onyai's comments gave evidence of an informative intention which hearers (guided by the principle of relevance) tried to make sense of in receiving the entrails' message." (713)

As seen in this example, during a divination ceremony the principle of relevance or principle of charity is limited by the 'mere event' of text or diviner (see also Zeitlyn 1990, 655). That is, divination is a case of "supply-side" communication, where the diviner or author makes statements ambiguous enough for the hearer to supply his own relevance. The art is to balance the specificity of content with enough interpretive space for the hearer or hearers to supply their own "relevance"/"theory". In some cases the divination technique can speak for itself, needing little interpretation from the diviner. In other cases more interpretation is called for. Divination thus balances mechanism and interpretation in addition to content and ambiguity.

From a relevance theory perspective a successful diviner would be one who tends to maximize relevance. That is, an artist who maximizes the contextual implications of his reading while minimizing the cognitive efforts of his hearers. From Davidson's perspective the practice of divination, as with any form of communication, can never be formalized but rather involves the sharing of passing theories.

We may also pose a pseudo-communicative interaction between diviners and postulated superhuman agents. In normal conversation we coordinate with others by calling attention to objects and events. In normal conversation we don't generally think that objects and events, such as dark spots in a goat's small intestine, are put in our cognitive environment by superhuman agents as communicative signs. So unlike the case of two people in conversation, the diviner interprets objects or events to be put in the world as bearers of information, as the focus of attention. In the case of mechanical divination there is both an institutionalized process of interpretation that forms the background, and an art of reading signs.

The diviner may actually believe that the first object he looks at will provide the means of his interpretation (see Guillaume 1938, 120). In this case, there is a principle of relevance at work whereby the diviner expects the object to be relevant. The diviner thus regards superhuman agents to be making manifest some object in the diviner's cognitive environment. This object will have ramifications for the postulated mutually manifest environment, or in Davidson's terminology the objects and events incorporated in the projected passing theory, between the diviner and the superhuman agents. While in most forms of communication people assume that much of their own cognitive environment or prior theory is not available to the hearer, in the case of divination the diviner supposedly has access to greater degrees of that environment, the degree depending on what superhuman agent the diviner supposedly mediates.

But the relevance of any particular sign will only be determined in the course of the interaction between the diviner and the human consulter or consulters. The interpretation or utterance offered is thus subject to a second real round of relevance, whereby the consulter interprets the new cognitive and physical environment established by the diviner.[30] Good diviners are thus more skilled at recognizing and manipulating

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[30] I would argue that in Abbink's example (note 29), this 'real' round takes place after the woman's death. The diviner was successful in part because the participants believe that the divination ritual predicted her death.

these cognitive environments, a practice encouraged by appeal to divinatory technologies, which can change the cognitive environment.

The diviner thus makes appeal to superhuman agents in order to involve unconventional objects in the shared cognitive environment. By directing attention at the mechanical technology of divination the diviner can offload the interpretive resources, allowing communication to extend to the environment as a whole.

In sum, the same communicative or mentalizing principles (discussed above) are in place, but they are modified in the context of divination. In divination systems, attention is directed at objects and events in the environment. These objects and events are mutually manifest, shared, or objects in triangulation. The consulter understands that these objects and events are invested with a superhuman intentionality. Movement is meant to give her some insight into some design or desire.

The content of divinatory communication is explained partly by the fact that people desire a diviner's utterances to be relevant. Thus the interests (the propositions desired, the objects desired) take a central place in divinatory communication. The interests (a relation between desire and an object) and beliefs (propositions held true) together provide the meaning of the utterances.

Finally, the notion of pattern is of crucial concern in divination, for the very process of focusing on an interpretation is one of pattern recognition. Patterns – of both events or attitudes like belief, and objects, like dice, stars, or spots – provide the code on which the pragmatic interpretation is based. For Davidson, the recognition of an underlying pattern behind someone's beliefs and practices is the initial step in the theory, while for RT it is the recognition of a set of assumptions that are made manifest through communicative behavior.

Domestication **of Divination**:

In some cases, by virtue of 'charisma', institutional apparatus, or rhetorical skill there is excessive cognitive processing over a text or a diviner; in these cases opaque utterances often become subject to excessive reflection. Literate environments especially tend to produce excessive reflection on utterances, though such reflection may take place in non-literate environments, for example in the Vedic case, due to sophisticated ritual technologies.

Davidson's theory and Relevance theory have been applied to both spoken communication and textual interpretation.[31] The analysis of sacred text, from the perspective of Relevance theory's cost-benefit approach, would seem to be a useless expenditure of time and energy. Wilson and Sperber explain this by the fact that the number and quality of the implications of interpretation can outweigh the time dedicated to achieving them (Sperber and Wilson, 77). I suggest that the Biblical text is the paradigmatic case of what Sperber and Wilson refer to, in the above context, as the "over-processing" of a text (77). That is, both sacred texts and divination are cases where the relevance is artificially high as a result of context surrounding these interpretive processes.

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[31] See note 11.

Though there is little empirical research studying the effects of literacy on mentalizing abilities[32], I argue that the five communicative principles found in the comparison of RT and DT undergo changes in the context of written communication (reading and writing) to varying degrees depending on the media, methods, and institutions involved in the process. First, texts take on communicative intentions that are displaced across time and space. Second, new objects and events are recognized in the mutual environment or in triangulation, for example, graphic representations of language such as letters or graphemes, or morphological rules that become the basis of grammatical reflection. Third, through joint attention these objects and events become part of the content of communication. Fourth, these new objects are understood in the context of new theories and their implied interests and ontologies.[33] Fifth, obviously reading is an entirely new paradigm of communicative pattern recognition. Literate communication will also substantially change what Wilson and Sperber refer to as cognitive efficiency. Reading and writing put different physiological constraints on communication to which communicators must adapt. (See Schribner and Cole, 203, 237 and Levy 2005, 220)

Writing and Prophecy:

There are no studies of 'theory of mind' or mentalizing in the Hebrew Bible; the closest is probably Wolff's (1996). Based on the preliminary conclusions above, however, we may say that in scribal traditions superhuman agents, too, are subject to a different focus, the focus of "literary minds." Their texts are second order reflections on folk systems of the day. In the case of the colonized scribal culture responsible for the Biblical text, they found it necessary to implement, or at the very least retain, a ban against most forms of magic, but especially that of divination. At the same time, prophecy comes to ascendancy.[34]

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[32] In a personal correspondence Simon Baron-Cohen also confirms he knows of no studies examining the relation between autism or mentalizing and literacy (October, 2005). There are, however, a few meager empirical studies on this issue such as Frith's brief discussion of autism and written language (Frith 2003). She claims that autistic people who can read 1) tend to prefer written communication over face-to-face contact, 2) tend not to read for overall meaning, paying more attention to individual words (125-126). She notes a study she carried out on this topic (Snowling and Frith 1986). See also a whole volume dedicated to autism and literacy (Butler 2003). Three recent dissertations discuss the relation between theory of mind and literacy more explicitly (Knotek 1996; Anderson 1998; Holman 2004). See also three studies on the effects of literacy on the functional organization of the brain (Castro-Caldas et al. 1998; Morais and Kolinsky 2000; Petersson et. al. 2001).

[33] Learning to read or write should thus be understood as contributing or constituting a change in theory of the kind Gopnik and Melzoff (1997) discuss. They argue that children's theories are directly analogous to scientific theories. A change in theory is like a quantum leap that implies a new ontology.

[34] Karel van der Toorn (2000) notes a similar process in Babylonia. While the concept of Biblical prophecy is a unique invention, "domestication" via writing is not unique to Biblical Israel. For example, in an article on Mesopotamian prophecy, van der Toorn (2000) contrasts Old Babylonian (1800-1200 BCE) 'prophecy' with Neo-Assyrian (1200-600 BCE) 'prophecy'. He finds four major differences in 'prophecy' between the two periods. The first contrast concerns, "the purpose of the written record of prophetic oracles." (72) In the older period, writing was not used as a means of preservation, "but as an aid in communication of the prophetic message on a synchronic level," while in the more recent period, tablets were written "for archival storage and reference purposes," and were dissociated from their "immediate historical contexts thus "whereas Old Babylonian prophecy is punctual… Neo-Assyrian prophecy is durative." (77) The second contrast concerns, "the perception of the person of the prophet or prophetess."

The difference between these two related forms of divination is not always clear. Biblical prophecy accepts the presence of multiple superhuman agents with whom diviners may mediate, but these agents' mediation leads to falsities. In contrast, the Judean god who goes by many different names is represented as leading to truths. This arrangement brings content to the late Biblical interest in distinguishing between true and false prophecy, or prophecy and divination; for example, in the book of Jeremiah. In my view, the central difference concerns precisely the suite of theory of mind concepts discussed above that change in the context of robust literacy and literary practice. These men saw no value in divination, the then dominant and competing theory of mind-reading.

The distinction between divination and prophecy thus concerns the fact that prophetic books are the result of a scribal community. Though there are some problems with his approach because he falls into many of the traps the Schribner and Cole mention (see 9-13), Ilkka Pyysiainen (1999) has recently theorized some relevant cognitive and conceptual changes that religion undergoes once the technology of writing is available. Writing allows for an "external memory store" (Sperber 1996a, 74-75; Boyer 2001, 321), providing us "with a powerful extension of our cognitive capacities." (Pyysiainen, 278) In general, writing and literacy "introduce in religious specialists a more urgent need for theoretical coherence because the whole of the tradition can be more easily accessed in written form."[35] (282)

Pyysianien further enumerates a series of overlapping ramifications as a result of the technology. Among these are that a focus on religion *as such* is a literary artifact (271); that religions may become deterritorialized as a result of this greater degree of abstraction; that circular reasoning becomes inevitable; that radically counter-intuitive ideas which would normally be forgotten are "stored" by virtue of the technology (281).[36]

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(72) Old Babylonian prophets tended to be anonymous, while Neo-Assyrian prophets were never so. Relatedly, while the Old Babylonian prophets could be "connected to the cults of a variety of gods" the great majority of Neo-Assyrian prophets were connected to the goddess Ishtar. The third contrast concerns, "the cultic context of prophecy." (72) While Old Babylonian prophecy only took place in temples and sanctuaries, in the Neo-Assyrian case "the collection tablets contain no indication where the oracles were first delivered." (82) The Neo-Assyrian prophets need not have been in the presence of the divine image to prophesy. The final contrast concerns, "the way in which the prophecies depict the intervention of the gods." (72) While Old Babylonian "gods secure the success of the king with their presence on earth, the Neo-Assyrian deities influence… by an intervention from heaven." (84) That is, in the former case, "gods accompanied the royal army in the form of images and other visible forms," with weapons even seen as objects of worship. (85) In the latter, a cosmic force from heaven intervenes in military affairs. Note the similar trends that Shloen describes, see note 8.

[35] Thus access is what differentiates the memorization technology that allowed for the Vedas and the writing technology that allowed for the Bible. For a critique of Goody for his lack of accounting for the Vedas, see (Holdrege 1994, 413-420).

[36] Giddens (1984) also emphasizes storage technology in his comparison of "allocative" or material resources and "authoritative" resources. He points out that "in oral cultures memory is virtually the sole repository of information storage," yet "memory (or recall) is to be understood not only in relation to the psychological qualities of individual agents but also as inhering in the recursiveness of institutional reproduction." (261) For Giddens "storage presumes modes of space-time control" and involves "the retention and control of information or knowledge whereby social relations are perpetuated across time-space. Storage presumes *media* of information representation, modes of information *retrieval* or recall and, as with all power resources, modes of its dissemination… The character of the information medium… directly influences the nature of the social relations which it helps to organize." Writing, "the prime mode of the collation and storage of information in class-divided societies," thus marks "a radical disjuncture in

Whereas a biological mechanism allows minorly counter-intuitive beliefs a greater propensity to be remembered (Boyer 2001)[37], it is artificial technology that allows for the storage of radically counter-intuitive ideas.[38]

By way of conclusion, I add another. In literate religion, written technology isolates and affects folk psychology, especially semantic concepts associated with mentalizing abilities (theory of mind). Literate religion is parasitic on non-literate forms to the extent that literate religion takes advantage of mentalizing mechanisms common to all religions. The basis of literate religion's comparative advantage over non-literate religion (divination), however, concerns the positing of new objects and events for second-order intersubjective reflection, such as propositions (*davar* in Hebrew, *logos* in Greek) or intentions. A text, unlike the natural environment or the organs of dead animals, actually does *say something*. This difference partly explains how the sacred text can serve as the mind of a god; for, in literate religions, texts become superhuman agents. I thus suggest that the polemic against divination in the Hebrew Bible, which claims that divination is empty or *meaning*less, is a form of hermeneutic competition.

After presenting some preliminary arguments, I have compared Davidson and Wilson and Sperber's principles of communication, shown the changes these undergo in the context of literate environments, and argued that these differences help us understand the polemic against divination in the Hebrew Bible. The conditions of access to reading and writing and their distribution in a population may account for the polemic against

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history," not only on account of storage technology but also "because the nature of 'tradition' becomes altered, changing the sense in which human beings live 'in' history," for example in pre-Ch'in China. Thus, for Giddens, "the introduction of writing means that tradition becomes visible as tradition, a specific way, among others, of doing things," thereby becoming open to "interrogation." (201) See Giddens (1984) 200-201, 260-261. Note that Giddens (1984) has a monolithic conception of "writing" as a blanket phenomenon; it is not situated in any way, though his approach (*structuration theory*) does not in general run counter the idea of situated or embodied literacies.

[37] Boyer's brief comments about literate religion are helpful, though superficial (Boyer 2001, 270ff.). Boyer accepts a rather untutored view of literacy. He thinks literacy is an essential part of "organized" religion and "theology", though he thinks the origin of "religious guilds" is a result of both literacy *and* complex polities, which are "naturally intertwined." He thinks literate guilds competed with localized "illiterate" religions. Boyer argues further that literate religious guilds "offer account of gods and spirits that is generally integrated (most elements hand together and cross reference one another), apparently deductive (you can infer the guild's position on a whole variety of situations by considering the general principles) and stable (you get the same message from all members of the guild)." (278)

[38] Specifically the differences are as follows. First, and primarily, literacy allows for a different focus on religion; in fact, the very idea of religion is a literary artifact (271). Second, access to the whole of tradition at once allows for a greater degree of coherence and complexity (270). Third, religions may become deterritorialized as a result of this greater degree of abstraction; that is, "the territorial boundaries defining ethnic religion are replaced in literate religions by the conceptual boundaries provided by the 'portable fatherland.' (272) Fourth, circular reasoning becomes inevitable because texts come to serve as their own foundation (272). Fifth, practical reasoning tends to be replaced by theoretical reasoning (275). In part because, sixth, "half-understood information" may be more easily "stored in memory" as written artifact. In this way literate religion (that is, theology) and science are similar because they deal with this type of information. (275) Theology becomes a form of artificial communication. Seventh, the storage of partial or incomplete information allows for the 'guru' or 'mystery' effect (See also http://www.dan.sperber.com/guru.htm) whereby people accept certain statements even when they contradict with folk experiences, based on the authority of texts. Mysteries are then cognitively "quarantined" until they can potentially be resolved, but are nevertheless operative. Eighth, radically counter-intuitive ideas which would normally be forgotten are thereby "stored" by virtue of the technology (281).

divination in the sense that writing leads to changes in 'theory of mind', which is the center of gravity of the polemic. My argument is only preliminary because there is little research on the effects of literacy on 'theory of mind', and no research on 'theory of mind' within the Hebrew Bible (and by extension within the polemic). Further research is thus in order, especially that which would correlate the polemic more explicitly with the effects of writing on the five principles of communication: intention, interest, content, attention, and pattern recognition.[39]

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