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Abstract
Donald Davidson's concept of "anomalous monism" is not nearly as well known as his related attack on the idea of "conceptual schemes," though they are closely related. This concept, I shall argue, has several important implications for the study of religion. In particular, it implies that, as an account of mind and language, "cognitive science" is going to be of limited interest. More-over, and that approaches to the study of religion based on models drawn from cognitive science are likely to be "degenerate research programmes." If this is so, then we can reasonably marginal-ize such programmes to the extent that they compete with more promising projects.

In the August 2005 issue of *Gourmet*, Fuschia Dunlop recounts her attempt to introduce "three outstanding chefs from Sichuan province, a heartland of Chinese gastronomy" (2005: 62), to one of the temples of contemporary American cooking, Thomas Keller's French Laundry in California's Napa Valley. Much to her chagrin, however, these sophisticated Chinese chefs are mostly appalled by the weird and barbaric foods put before them. By the third day, "they choose to eat in a notoriously bad Chinese restaurant rather than brave another fine by West-ern meal," and it is only when they secure a rice-cooker for a simple stir-fry that she sees them "happy and relaxed" (64). I suppose that this is a common enough experience, but it is also one that instantiates what Donald Davidson calls "anomalous monism." Davidson has figured in the philosophy of religion since the mid-1970s, particularly in discussions of rationality, relativism, and concep-tual schemes. His "anomalous monism," however, has received less comment. This is unfortunate because, as I will argue in what follows, when anomalous

monism is properly understood it provides good reasons for suspecting that "cognitive science" and its allied projects are, in a phrase derived from Imre Lakatos, "degenerate research programmes" (1978: 5).[1] Dunlop's gastronomical contre-temps, in other words, points up a moral about the study of human beings and their institutions that students of religion would do well to heed, if only because it will contribute to the time they can spend outside the library, engaging the various forms of food, literature, sex, politics, and religion, that make us want to keep living our little lives and putting off the big sleep.

From Rational Choice to the Emergence of Thought

Though he became well known in the 1960s for his writings on action and philosophy of language, most of Donald Davidson's earliest published work was in formal decision theory. Reflecting on that work in 1997, Davidson writes that:

> Decision theory is often derided as a false description of how people actually act... As a description of actual behavior, decision theory seems false because there is no completely satisfactory way to test it; the test always depends on exactly how the theory is given empirical application. Nevertheless, the theory answers to our intuitions about how actual decisions are made; in effect it simply spells out our commonsense apparatus for explaining intentional action (Davidson 2001: 126).

Rational action is explained in terms of intentions. Intentions incorporate views about the way the world is, the way the agent would like it to be, and the various ways in which the agent might bring about the desired state of affairs. While we rarely articulate all of this in detail, what Davidson means by our "common sense apparatus" comes out when we look back on the actions of others and when we contemplate what we're going to do for dinner. Imagine the following exchange:

> "I hear George and Martha are divorcing."
> "Why?"
> "I guess Martha can't take it anymore, what with George's bitterness, the constant mind-games, and the drinking."

Or consider the following:

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[1] Although I use Lakatos' term, I am not committed to his account of scientific rationality.

> "What should we do for dinner?"
> "I don't know. We had roast beef yesterday. Given the temperature, Japanese sounds good."
> "Should we order in?"
> "Not Japanese! The yellowtail is warm and the eel loses its crispness. Let's go to Koji's."
> "Good enough."

There is nothing complex going on in either case. There is a situation that calls, in the first case, for explanation, and in the second for resolution. They both move to statements of fact that are also loaded with judgments of comparative value. In explaining Martha's decision it goes without saying that George's bitterness makes him cruel and unpleasant to be around, that their drinking reinforces resentfulness and cruelty, detracts from their ability to keep from lashing out, and that the mind-games, while perhaps not as bad as physical abuse (though I'm not sure about this), amount to a form of co-dependent torture. Given the awfulness of the situation, Martha's filing for divorce seems pretty reasonable. The case of dinner works pretty much the same way.

Note that the accounts of the decisions we attribute to Martha and our unnamed pair are neither fool-proof nor logically compelled. More evidence could tip the scale against Martha's decision or against going to Koji's. This evidence could be about facts or preferences, but any explanation or resolution will have to have some combination of both because, "we all, whether we think about it or not, make our decisions in terms of how we weigh the values of various possible outcomes of our actions, and how likely we think one or another course of action is to attain those values" (Davidson 2001: 126). A decision that took no account of the way the world is would be irrational; one that ignored preferences would be inhuman.

It's worth reflecting on the last half of the last sentence because it was meant literally, not as a rhetorical gesture. "If a mouse had vocal cords of the right sort," writes Davidson, "you could train it to say 'Cheese'. But that word would not have a meaning when uttered by the mouse, nor would the mouse understand what it 'said'" (2001: 127). The counterfactual mouse in question would be doing nothing more than responding to a stimulus. For a word to have meaning or, what amounts to the same thing, for a sequences of noises to express a belief, it must be part of a practice of communication, at least one part of the goal of which must be that the speaker intend that any second-person hearers grasp the point of the speaker's attempt to communicate. Central to the practice of communication are the beliefs that there are second

persons with whom to communicate and that they are similarly causally related to a shared world. Without the second person as the object of a communicative intention it is impossible to understand what it would mean to convey propositional content. And without the second person's responses to that communicated content it is impossible to generate the notion of truth. For truth appears when we move beyond the simple stimulus responses of the mouse to the more complex case of attempting to share some bit of propositional content with somebody else. The first-person responses of adult humans would only be so many grunts and groans without "the interaction of at least two speaker-interpreters, for," Davidson argues, "there would be no saying what a speaker was talking or thinking about, no basis for claiming he could locate objects in an objective space and time, without interaction with a second person" (2001: 121).[2]

It's important to keep in mind that Davidson is not proposing an account of the history of the development of language. The requirement of a second person simply illustrates the inherently social aspect of language and thought. "Success in communicating propositional contents," he writes, "is what we need to understand before we ask about the nature of meaning or of language" (Davidson 2005: 120). Talking about language and thought presupposes the kind of interaction Davidson calls "triangulation." Triangulation is seen where any two or more agents interact with the world and with each other in response to some fact about the world. "One sees this in its simplest form," he notes, "in a school of fish, where each fish reacts almost instantaneously to the motions of the others. This is apparently a reaction that is wired in" (2001: 128). In some, more complex, creatures, triangulation results from learned reactions, as when certain monkeys (he doesn't say which), "make three distinguishable sounds depending on whether they see a snake, an eagle, or a lion approaching" (2001: 128). If it were a matter of just the individual monkey, distinguishing the various sounds would be pointless, but the variation is tied to what we can only call a form of cooperative interaction: Climbing a tree is more appropriate to lion evasion than running, for example; hiding works better against something that hunts by sight from a distance. How monkeys

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[2] Davidson is aware that he is getting at the same point about language made by Wittgenstein in his critique of the very idea of a private language. But the "private language argument" has, in the last 50 years, become so convoluted as to make wading in counterproductive. Several canonical early examples of the confusion are reprinted in Pitcher 1966. As Davidson sees it, the situation was hardly improved by Saul Kripke's 1982 reading of Wittgenstein. In many of his essays of the 1990s and early 2000s Davidson decides that the better part of valor is to "leave Wittgenstein out of this; I'll just say Kripkenstein" (2005: 119).

learn this, and how they have managed to pass this on across generations, I haven't the faintest idea. That it is purposeful seems clear.

Nonetheless, Davidson goes on to insist, this behavior "cannot be due to propositional beliefs, desires, or intentions, nor does their mode of communication constitute a language." (2001, 128) Why not? To attribute beliefs, desires, or intentions to an agent requires that we be able to identify the propositional content of those beliefs and the like, and be able to attribute understanding that content to the agent involved. Otherwise we have nothing more than stimulus and response, in the manner of the fish. While it may not be the only ground, one of the surest is the ability of the agent to notice errors. Thus, writes Davidson:

> It is when one has learned to say or to think, 'That looks green,' 'That man seems small,' 'I thought it was an oasis,' when one has said or thought that something blue was green, or that the large man in the distance was small, or that what looked like an oasis was a mirage, that one has truly mastered the distinction between appearance and reality, between believing truly and believing falsely (2004: 145).

The monkeys may make mistakes, but unless they can provide an account of exactly what mistake they made, we don't have adequate grounds for attributing propositional content to their noises. Without content, no language—and without language, no beliefs, desires, or intentions—can reasonably be attributed to anyone or anything.[3]

Conceptual Schemes, Rationality, and Truth

Davidson's essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" was, as he put it, "slow to reach its present form" (Davidson 1984: xi). First presented as a John Locke lecture in 1970, it was subsequently reformulated as his presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in 1973.[4] "Conceptual

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[3] Davidson recognizes, with equanimity, that this means that not only fish, but monkeys, whales, dolphins, and infants don't make it into the language-using community (see 2001: 127-128; 2004: 135-138). Yet, he seems to draw no particular moral conclusions from this and plainly from the fact alone that some groups of animals don't make it into the community of language-users nothing at all follows about how we should treat them.

[4] Many of us, however, first encountered the argument in Richard Rorty's 1972 paper "The World Well Lost." Rorty documents his debt to Davidson in note four of this paper, as reprinted in Rorty (1982: 17). Davidson's essay has been oft reprinted. Both essays are brought together to explicate rationality by Jeffrey Stout (1981: chap. 8). Further developments along this line may be found in Godlove (1989).

relativism," writes Davidson, "is a heady and exotic doctrine, or would be if we could make good sense of it. The trouble is, as so often in philosophy, it is hard to improve intelligibility while retaining the excitement" (1984: 183). It is exotic because it seems to claim that there are whole worlds of human experience inhabited by some but completely inaccessible to other members of the species.[5] The world of the Inuit or the Yanomami, we're asked to believe, is qualitatively different from our own.

But when we go on to ask how they might be different, the exotic tends to pale. "Whorf," writes Davidson, "wanting to demonstrate that Hopi incorporates a metaphysics so alien to ours that Hopi and English cannot, as he puts it, 'be calibrated,' uses English to convey the contents of sample Hopi sentences" (1984: 184). The excitement, to grasp for an analogy, seems to come from saying that some peoples see the world like Renoir and others like Cezanne or Perugino, or Hiroshige. But when we try to explicate this, it either turns out to mean the very improbable (e.g., "the world they see looks to them like their paintings look to us") or the very uninteresting (e.g., "Cezanne paints mountains differently from the way they are painted by Perugino or Hiroshige"). The former is improbable because paintings are macro-sized compositions on which the artist has chosen to distribute line and color in various ways depending on style and desired effect, while the visual field, if we want to talk that way, and the neurophysics of sight don't seem to work that way. The latter is philosophically uninteresting because it is perfectly intelligible and ultimately no more inaccessible than a good art history textbook. When Joshua Taylor writes of a Perugino crucifixion that "Each of these schemes would be quite possible, but the effect of the pictures, their expressive content, would be very different," (Taylor 1957: 48) nothing is hidden; he draws the figures and discusses why he believes that different compositional choices would have had different impacts on viewers.

If "different conceptual schemes" turns out to mean "different beliefs about the world and how it works," the philosophical excitement pales even more. Most of us expect people to differ from us in at least some of their beliefs, particularly over time and distance. It's only if we came to believe that a group of people differed greatly from us in their beliefs at another time and place that we would be excited once again; maybe on food, politics or sexual interests, but not, we're inclined to think, on the nuts and bolts of a world we navigate

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[5] I am bracketing, for the time being, any questions about the non-human. Davidson and I agree that it is difficult to make sense of nonhuman experience, but the argument against that is merely an extension of the argument rehearsed in what follows.

together day by day. Were someone to be sitting here in my office and not discern the books, the computers, the assistant in the outer office, and the various plants on my window sill, I would be very puzzled. Were he a non-English speaker, our conversation about them might be pretty rudimentary, but that's a different subject. Were he either an English speaker, or a speaker of one of the languages I can negotiate, and make odd pronouncements about the things in and around my office, that would be the most puzzling thing of all. After a couple of odd remarks—"Who walks this dog when you're on vacation," say, spoken as we examine my begonias—I would have to question either my grasp of the language, his grasp of the language, or the sanity of one of us. But to give one up is to give up the notion of *alternative* conceptual schemes entirely.

This might seem a quick jump, but it isn't. Bad Latin isn't an alternative conceptual space; it's just bad Latin. And being nuts isn't an alternative scheme; it's some form of psychopathology. To pin down the idea of a "conceptual scheme" requires that we articulate a dualism of scheme and content that makes room for undifferentiated input, a scheme that organizes that input, and the content which results from that organizing activity. But this, as Davidson notes, is "a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. The third, and perhaps the last, for if we give it up it is not clear that there is anything distinctive left to call empiricism" (1984, 189). If "post-analytic philosophy" means anything when applied to Davidson and Brandom (I have my doubts about McDowell), it groups them in a set of philosophers trained by the heirs of Russell and Carnap to believe that there was something like a scientific method which could be philosophically distilled into something called "logical empiricism" and who subsequently came to believe that this empiricism, as a philosophical doctrine, was no better off than the approaches it had displaced.[6] This didn't

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[6] Versions of this story have become legion in the last quarter century and more. Richard Rorty (P.A. Phil) laid much of the documentary foundation for it in *The Linguistic Turn*, his introduction to which is a precursor to the more expansive story told in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Both are reflections on the methodological, or metaphilosophical, moves undertaken to quell the "disgust" experienced by the likes of Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, and Wittgenstein "at the spectacle of philosophers quarreling endlessly over the same issues." (Rorty ed. 1967, 1) But Rorty's version of the story goes even further back, to his earliest article, where he writes that "a little empiricism, plus a passion for rigor, will make a man a nominalist. Thinking about the antinomies created by the mutual repugnance of experience and rigor will drive him, if he things as long and as hard as Peirce and Wittgenstein did, to something quite different" (Rorty 1961: 198). By the end of his life, I believe, Davidson also maintained something close to this version of the story, though sustaining that interpretation of Davidson would be a complicated undertaking. Let it suffice to note one remark from the mid-1990s: "Rorty says that,

mean that logic or science was bunk, only that they could not play the role of undisputed intellectual arbiter their proponents believed they could play. Wittgenstein, first an icon then a critic of analytic philosophy, puts it succinctly when he writes that, "if language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments" (Wittgenstein 1958: 242). These judgments are only intelligible because, "the common behaviour of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (Wittgenstein 1958: 206). If we must agree in judgments, and if our common behavior is the "system of reference," then there is no neutral high ground for logic or the sciences to inhabit.

There is also no place for conceptual schemes. If most of our judgments must agree, then most of our judgments must be true. Otherwise it would be impossible for us to negotiate the world we share. And if we mostly agree about a world we share, then the exotic sounding "alternative conceptual schemes" can only be shorthand for the mundane "judgments about which we disagree." Given the multiple ways that groups of people attempt to interpret the world and each other, we should expect disagreement even within the same group. These disagreements manifest themselves in what some interlocutors experience as anomalous utterances; for instance: "I am a black cockatoo," "the sin-offering shall be slaughtered before the LORD in the place where the whole-offering is slaughtered," "we can assume that the device PD contains a recursive specification of a set of pairs (S,P), where S is a signal and P is a percept…" This is pretty arcane stuff, but it doesn't help much in understanding that these remarks are made by people inhabiting different conceptual schemes. What we need to do is learn something about Australian religion (Durkheim 1995), the Torah of Israel (Leviticus 6:25), or Chomsky's approach to linguistics (Chomsky 1963). We might not agree in every detail with any of the people disposed to talk in these ways, but because we share an understanding of how people generally respond to the promptings of the world around them, we can come, with enough study, to understand why they talk the way

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properly interpreted, my message to the skeptic is to 'tell him to get lost', thus aligning myself with the later Wittgenstein or the early Heidegger. I am now inclined to go along with Rorty" (Davidson 2004: 6). It should be clear that I, too, am inclined to go along Rorty, but it's only fair to say that this version has had its critics. Without trying to sort the issues out here, it's worth taking a look at Dummett (1993) for the Continental roots, Baker (1996) for a view of Wittgenstein as passeé, and Soames (2003) for an insider's guide, none of which could be said to portray philosophy as "post-analytic." For an historian's take on Rorty's place in the oddysey of American philosophy see Kuklick (2001). All these volumes can direct the reader to still other versions of the story.

they do.[7] This means that we can, at least in principle, come to understand what people say and write, thus what they desire and value, in a shared world about which most people, most of the time, hold mostly true beliefs.

From Triangulation to Anomalous Monism

If explaining rational action requires attributing language to the agents, with the full panoply of beliefs, intentions, and desires, what about interpreting language? From at least the early 1970s, Davidson has insisted that "the problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign… All understanding of the speech of another involves radical translation" (Davidson 1984: 125). The domestic case risks misleading us because we usually take for granted two of the components in understanding someone with whom we share a language. Nonetheless, interpretation involves a triangulation of some stimulus, causally connected to my world, the response I am inclined to make as a result, and the response that some other individual is inclined to make to the same stimulus. Imagine, for instance, that my kids and I are strolling through the mall. My daughter Rosalie peels off to investigate some earrings while Grady and I continue on to the food court. After awhile I get tired of waiting and start to get up to find her, but before I can Grady exclaims, "There she comes." Because we share a language and an interest in this particular person showing up, it doesn't occur to me either to worry about what his words mean or the particular stimulus to which he is responding; I simply scan the general direction in which he's looking, pick out the tallish, long-haired girl in question, and respond, "it's about time." But the fact that I take his use of language and the

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[7]   For spelling out the way in which talking and reasoning and acting hang together it may well be, as Jeff Stout maintains, that Brandom's "inferentialism" is more illuminating than Davidson's approach (Stout 2002: 45). The reason for this, I think, lies in the way Brandom weaves observation and action into the complex of linguistic phenomena by explaining them in terms of "discursive entry" and "discursive exit" moves (Brandom 2000: 83). This allows the pragmatics of discourse—talking—to be an object of straight forward natural study out of which can emerge a clearly connected account of experience and action without any antecedent invocation of sense-data, stimuli, or other problematic notions. Giving reasons becomes a matter of making explicit the commitments of a particular player in a complex social game. Justifying reasons can then be done in terms of entry and exit moves. What you end up with is a methodological monism that is complex but theoretically unified. But I'm inclined to agree with Stout that the differences between them "are mainly verbal" (2002: 44). Since I'm going to make much of Davidson's "anomalous monism," it seems prudent to stick with Davidson and defer to Stout's sense that what Davidson does can also be accomplished with equal if not greater elegance by Brandom.

stimulus that provoked it for granted doesn't eliminate them as components of interpretation.

It turns out that this seemingly simple bit of interpretation carries with it some important implications. I need to have a grasp of adverbs, pronouns, and verbs. I need to know that of all the relevant females that "he" might pick out, the only one Grady cares about at the moment is Rosalie. I must know that "There comes Rosalie" is true only if there comes Rosalie and that Grady believes, probably on the basis of a simple perception, that "There comes Rosalie" is true. Finally, I must believe that Grady intends to communicate this belief to me.

The situation is basically no different if I am interpreting a string of noises produced by a person I don't know in a language I don't know; it just takes more work. I assume that the previously unknown speaker of a hitherto unencountered language is the same sort of creature that I am, that he is causally connected to the world pretty much the same way that I am, and that the noises constitute a speech-act by which he intends to communicate something to me about the world around us. And this remains part of the background even when my translation turns out to miss the point. David Carrasco tells this story about an early Spanish encounter with the natives of the "Land of the Turkey and Deer:"

> Attempting to figure out their location the Spaniards shouted, "What is this place called?" The natives replied, "Uic athan," meaning, "We do not understand your words." In an ironic turn of meaning characteristic of many changes that were to follow, the Spaniards decided to call this area Yucatan, a place name that is now the permanent designation for this eastern part of Mesoamerica (Carrasco 1990: 1).

The story is told, at least in part, to illustrate both the hubris of the Spaniards and "inventions and fantasies," they concocted about this "'strange new world' with different languages, customs, symbols, cuisines, philosophies, manners, and landscapes" (Carrasco 1990: 2). However, it also illustrates the importance of Davidson's method of solving the problem of "the interdependence of belief and meaning by holding belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning. This is accomplished by assigning truth conditions to alien sentences that make native speakers right when plausibly possible, according, of course, to our own view of what is right" (Davidson 1984: 137). In radical interpretation we have to start with our views because those are the only ones we have. The Spaniards lept a little too soon in supposing that "Uic athan" was an answer to "¿Como se llama este lugar?" or however they put it, but within

a few decades, their heirs recognized the mistake and called them to account.[8] Presumably the knowledge of Nahuatl was the result of making native speakers right when plausibly possible.

Because meaning and belief are so closely interwoven, radical interpretation requires that we attribute beliefs to the speakers we are trying to interpret. And because we must make those beliefs correlate with ours, we naturally correlate the meanings of their utterances with those we are disposed to use in the situation. Imagine going into a pharmacy in a country whose language you read pretty well—Spain, for example—but which you don't regularly use. What you want is something like Neosporin and some bandages to use on blisters you have inflicted on yourself through overly avid sight-seeing. You might try a couple of things, rejecting the pharmacist's suggestions. After the barbaric "unguenta antibiotica" (you're hoping that "unquent" has a Spanish analog) he grabs a small rectangular box that reads "Terramicina: Pomada Topica." "Eso es!" you respond, not quite ideomatically, but he gets it, smiles, and rings up a few Euros. This is the sort of triangulation with which we are all familiar.

As we make the small triangulating steps toward securing just the box we need, we are tacitly deploying a notion of "satisfaction" in determining whether or not a particular word or phrase adequately translates that of the other. To conclude that "pomada" translates "ointment" is to make a normative judgment. It registers the newly formed belief that the one meets your standard for substituting for the other. But since our norms, and the ways we apply them, are unique to each individual, what we really work with are individual ideolects which are themselves judged adequate to count as versions of English or Spanish or Chinese. But a well travelled person is fully aware that the English of Australia differs from that of California, which differs from that of Massachusetts. Consider the hoagie. Is it or is it not a sub? How about a grinder? The norms that govern what counts as a well formed statement are constantly in flux, even at the local level, and ever evolving at the state, national, and international levels.

Since use, meaning, and belief are in constant, if sometimes only glacial, motion, there can be no static, fixed, and total description of English or any other language. Since individuals evolve in their language use, there couldn't

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[8] There are various versions of the story. Carrasco doesn't cite the original for his, but one of the oldest, perhaps even the original, version is that of Motolinía, in part three, chapter eight of his *History of the Indians of New Spain*, written probably in 1541. There he writes that, "speaking with the Indians of that coast, to what the Spaniards asked the Indians replied: "*tectetán, tectetán*," which means, "I don't understand you, I don't understand you" (Motolinía 1985, 332).

even be a complete description of a single ideolect. One implication of this is that there can be no general account of rationality that is not grossly simplistic. We've already seen Davidson make this point in a different guise discussing decision theory. Our theories of preference and rationality will always be rough and ready, or narrowed down for very specific purposes. If this is true, what's now generally known as "cognitive science" is an implausible candidate for "science" if that is measured by the accepted standard of physics. For one of the criteria for a fully articulated physics is that it eliminate all normative judgments in favor of a generalized account of the way the world works in terms of types of possible objects linked to events by formally specifiable laws. A physics that distinguished "proper" quarks from "defective" quarks would be seriously incomplete. What we want is an account that distinguishes all the possible variants from the others. We want a physics without *ceteris paribus* and similar clauses which leave open the possibility of non-commitment. And since psychology cannot pretend to the status of physics, Davidson's monism is anomalous.

The fruit of artificial intelligence and recent neuroscience, cognitive science is the latest version of 19th and early 20th century positivism. While it comes in a variety of forms, the most elaborate account is that of Paul Churchland. Churchland's position can be broken into three components: materialism, scientific progress, and the assault on what he calls "folk psychology." It's worth distinguishing these components in order to get clear about just where he and Davidson part company. While Davidson rarely, if ever, uses the term "materialism" for his position, his embrace of "monism" is intended to register the view that there is only one sort of stuff that enters into the causal relationships between ourselves and the rest of the world. The subject matter of physics, chemistry, and neurobiology is thus the same, only in increasingly complicated relationships. The ganglia, dendrites, and other structures that allow impulses to be transmitted from my toe striking the chair, through the nerves to the brain, provoking a snarling epithet, are made up of the sorts of compounds studied by organic chemists. The elements that make up organic compounds are of the same sort as those occupying the rest of the periodic table, all of which are made up of the sorts of stuff studied by nuclear chemists and their compatriots in physics departments. If somebody wants to lump this altogether and call it "matter," so be it, but the term is pointlessly argumentative, freighted as it is with the old-fashioned spirit/matter debate. We might as well use the more specific vocabulary of the latest science.

"Science" itself is a term usually itching for a fight. Since we abandoned its traditional meaning of "reasonably well defined body of knowledge about

some interesting subject of investigation," the term has mostly been a club in academic turf wars and the scramble for funding. Historians of science, for the last hundred years, have told an ever more complicated tale about natural philosophy subdivided into the various fields that populate the science buildings of the contemporary academy, and in the process have convinced all but the most illiterate of their practitioners to abandon the notion that there is a single "scientific" method that offers a high road to the truth. This, of course, doesn't mean that there is no progress in science. We know much more about the very largest and the very smallest parts of our universe today than we did fifty or a hundred years ago. This knowledge makes it possible for doctors and other practitioners of the engineering arts to do very useful things for us. They can also do more destructive things to us, but all things considered I doubt many people would give up what we've learned in favor of some luddite utopia. Of course, on this loose account, there has been progress in music, history, math, anthropology, and even philosophy in the last hundred years; it's just that less of that progress has immediate engineering applications.

So it turns out that what separates Davidson from Churchland and other apostles of cognitive science is the status of "folk psychology." By "folk psychology" Churchland seems to mean the vocabulary made up of "desires, beliefs, fears, intentions, perceptions, and forth," together with background laws that connect the vocabulary to particular explanations and predictions, as well as whatever ontology is presupposed by this complex (Churchland 1981: 68). It is particularly important to describe this as a "theory" because it is then possible to insist that, as with psychological theories generally, it is only credible to the extent that "it is successful… over competing theories" (Churchland 1981: 69). If it turns out that folk psychology is not the best available explanation for the systematic interpretation of human behavior, then, despite its venerability, the appropriate scientific move is to jettison it in favor of its better challenger. Folk psychology, on this scenario, should go the way of Ptolemaic astronomy and Priestley's phlogiston.

When Churchland looks to test the adequacy of folk psychology, he fixes on "the learning process itself, especially where it involves large-scale conceptual change, and especially as it appears in its prelinguistic or entirely nonlinguistic form (as in infants and animals), which is by far the most common form in nature" (Churchland 1981: 73). Churchland doesn't quite explain how it is that folk psychology "founders on the fact that how to formulate, manipulate, and store a rich fabric of propositional attitudes is itself something that is learned" (Churchland 1981: 74), but the idea seems to be something like this. Most infants and non-human animals learn all sorts of things without being

able to talk. If learning involves accepting propositions and then forming dispositions to act on the basis of cumulative accepted propositional content, it becomes very hard to explain pre-linguistic learning. Not only that, but the mechanisms by which at least some of us come to replace one part of our accepted propositions and their associated dispositions with others remains opaque. When asked, for example, how it was that he became a Lutheran, my brother is likely to say, "Christianity seemed reasonable and my wife was already a Lutheran." This may be true, but it doesn't tell us much about the mechanisms of changing the mind or how those mechanisms are connected to our other cognitive commitments.

Churchland doesn't offer much more by way of critique, either here or in his extensive body of work. Instead, he typically spends rather a lot of time presenting and defending the work of neuroscientists and formulating stories about what might be possible with the advance of brain research and its applications. If the two hemispheres of the human brain communicate, for example, might it not be possible for two distinct brains to do so as well? "Suppose," he asks us to imagine:

> that we can fashion a workable transducer to convert a symphony of neural activity into (say) microwaves radiated from an aerial in the forehead, and to perform the reverse functions of converting received microwaves back into neural activation... Once the channel is opened between two or more people, they can learn (*learn*) to exchange information and coordinate their behavior with the same intimacy and virtuosity displayed by your own hemispheres (Churchland 1981: 88).

However we feel about the prospect, there is no particular reason to deny that this neuro-intimacy might, someday, be possible. The relevant question is whether or not this would require that we jettison the propositional attitudes presupposed by folk psychology.

Davidson clearly thinks that we wouldn't. The triangulation in which we engage when we attempt radical interpretation is inescapably normative and the normativity of interpretation implies either that the material vocabulary envisioned by Churchland will reproduce that normativity or that it will be inadequate to the sort of complete description his eliminative materialism requires. Central to Davidson's argument is the disanalogy he perceives between linguistic and prelinguistic learning. In a late essay he writes that "Animals show by their behavior that they are making fine distinctions, and many of the things they discriminate we do too... but they do not perceive *that* anything is the case. Some non-human animals can learn a great deal, but

they do not learn *that* something is true" (Davidson 2004: 136). The distinction is between responding to stimuli and making judgments about claims. Neither Davidson nor I want to deny that various animals, including humans—or whales or bonobos—learn to make fine distinctions from among their various stimuli and act on them. But there is no evidence any non-human responds to any stimulus with "that's a Witchetty Grub," much less "that's a Witchetty Grub, which features prominently in the ritual life of the Arunta, an aboriginal people of Australia" (cf. Durkheim 1995: 338-354). This might seem a petty point were we not attempting to account for human behavior. Given that some people do (or at least did) make such classificatory judgements and then act on them, we need an account of action that can incorporate judgments and reasons in explaining actions.

Churchland and similar thinkers are inclined to respond that strictly computational, non-human, machines can be programmed to make classificatory judgments and act on them, thus suggesting the propositional attitudes Davidson thinks are crucial may, in fact, be dispensable. In a comparatively recent piece, for example, Churchland argues that it is possible to construct neuro-networks which can agree on questions of similarity of input despite "highly idiosyncratic synaptic connections; a pair of networks with hidden-layer neurons of quite different microcontents; a pair of networks whose input-output behaviors are nevertheless identical, because they are rooted in *a common conceptual framework* embodied in the activation spaces of their respective hidden layers" (Churchland 1998: 11). But this is beside the point. Even theoretical machine design requires, in order to carry out whatever computations it does, some set of normative standards, and those standards are invariably supplied by the mature machine designer or programmer. Even then, different models will display idiosyncratic judgments about the similarity. When Churchland writes that "such idiosyncracies should not be seen as a defect of our artificial models. People, too, display peripheral divergences in how they judge close similarities," he is missing the point (Churchland 1998: 18). Such idiosyncracies are a function of divergent local standards, which are always explained by the anomalous and potentially unpredictable ways in which language is learned.

Color terms are a particularly clear case of the problem. If we confine ourselves to a very broad division among the "primary" colors—red, yellow, and blue—it's possible to define "secondary" colors as orange, green, and violet. Many of us might pre-reflectively assume that sorting objects by these colors is intuitively immediate: The sky is blue, the grass is green, ripe tomatoes are red, etc. But if we consider olive or taupe, things suddenly become more

complicated. While I suppose it is possible to stipulate that such-and-such is taupe and that other such-and-such is olive, these are purely stipulative and subject to the usual disagreements. If there is ever a consensus, it will be no more than the enforced standard of a particular group at a particular point in time. But if that is true of these intermediate hues, it is no less true for the so-called primary colors, if only because "absolutely pure hues do not exist in artists' pigments" (Taylor 1957: 63). Nor are there pure hues in nature.

Or consider the following problematic situation. My friend Mark is married to a woman with a serious problem; she is pathologically sensitive to capsaicin, the principal "pungent" component in the various species of chili pepper. What Mark and the kids consider mild, Sharon finds inedibly hot. Since Mark does most of the cooking and shopping, this puts considerable constraints on his planning for the week. It also limits the places they can go for dinner. If Mark wants to understand this sad situation, how might he proceed? One thing he can't do is examine her sense-experiences, since this are indistinguishable from her reports and just tell him what he already knows. He might be interested in the biochemistry of pepper pungency. In doing so he will discover that the standard measure is named for Wilbur Scoville, who first devised the scale in the early twentieth century. In its contemporary form, refined by High Performance Liquid Chromatography, pure Capsaicin measures 16,000,000 Scoville units while a sweet Italian bell measures nothing much. The hottest pepper on record is a Habanero, measuring in at 577,000; the common Jalapeno runs from 2,500 to 10,000 Scoville units. So if he could induce Sharon to endure the testing, Mark might discover that his wife reacts to the Peperoncini, which Bosland and Votava describe as having "very little pungency or none at all" (Bosland & Votava 2000: 31), the way that he and the kids respond to a particularly piquant Piquin (50,000 SU). But this, of course, is only half the problem, because her response is unabashedly negative, while his is invigorating, brought on by the massive release of endorphins triggered by the capsaicin.

It might turn out that Sharon has unusually sensitive tissue, though this needn't be the case. More importantly, because many people in many cultures across the globe become so desensitized to capsaicin that they actively seek out its pungency, we would still want to know what other factors figure in Sharon's negative response. When we learn that she dislikes ginger, cilantro, and a variety of other spices and condiments, that she finds no appreciable difference between butter and margarine, and that she finds soy milk perfectly palatable, it begins to look like her aversion to capsicum is part of a larger repertoire of food likes and dislikes. In fact, her tastes in food are closely related, as are all

of ours, to a particular individual history that is unique, even when compared to other members of the family.

Like color recognition, taste is a mental act in the sense that it involves not merely whatever chemical events take place in the mouth, but also a sorting of the taste into multiple categories, which are themselves established by communities of tasters who enforce the local norms by pronouncing on the location of a given bite within the operative categories: "Too spicy," "bland," "sweet," "not salty enough," etc. They are, in other words, made possible by the complex holism of the mental in which judgments, intentions, beliefs, and desires all hang together. Because the standards by which we make our particular judgments have a history to ourselves we "do not have, and cannot expect to find, a way of mapping events described in the physical vocabulary onto events described in the mental vocabulary" (Davidson 2001: 127).

A more general, and perhaps more bold, way to make this point is to agree with Davidson's qualified statement that "there is no such a thing as a language... if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed" (Davidson 2005: 109-110). What he means is that in learning a language we do not acquire a single ability, shared with other speakers of the same language, to formulate and use tokens, whether verbal or written, created to conform to "a precise and specifiable set of syntactic and semantic rules" (Davidson 2005: 110). What we learn through mimicry, repetition, and discipline is an idiolect with which we negotiate our interactions with other people in the world around us. It turns out that we're usually successful because we talk more or less the same way that everybody around us does, but that doesn't mean that we are judged by the language, or that there is "a socially accepted way" of talking to which we must conform (cf. Davidson 2005: 118). The only thing communication requires is that my audience takes what I say in the way I intend them to.

Davidson's point here is that if there is no single, formal, thing that all talkers are required to have in order to be understood as English, Spanish, or Bantu speakers, there is nothing philosophically interesting to be discovered in the projects of linguists, cognitive scientists, or workers in artificial intelligence. This isn't to say that their projects won't facilitate the production of some really interesting machines. It's just that the formal languages, if we want to call them that, which are essential to programming those machines, are neither necessary nor sufficient for ordinary human talking. "Mutual understanding," Davidson writes, "is achieved through the exercise of imagination, appeal to general knowledge of the world, and awareness of human interests

and attitudes" (Davidson 2005: 110). After that it's triangulation, all the way down.

Of course, Davidson hastens to point out, the reason mature speakers of the language carry out this triangulation with such swift ease is that they have learned to use words, phrases, and "syntactical devices" in pretty much the same ways as the other people with whom they desire to communicate. But "pretty much" should be taken as a technical term, implying that we have little or no reason to believe that there is a single, well-formulated, systematically understood, thing called "language" which is shared by the majority of English, Spanish, or Bantu-speakers. It's a safe bet that there will be substantial variation in how and when different people use phrases such as "that's spicy," "he's hot," "chartreuse," "stool," and as many other words and phrases as anyone cares to consider. Because people learn to use their language in various, sometimes unpredictable ways, to serve purposes that are always subject to revision and change, there will never be a single complete theory for a human language. Even if there were, successful communication would still need imagination, knowledge, and "awareness of human interests and attitudes."

Cognitive Science and the Study of Religion

It is surely possible to allow, as Davidson does, that human beings are material creatures, through and through. Davidson insists, in fact, that "there are causal relations between events described as physical and events described as mental" (Davidson 2005: 204). Yesterday I finished the last piece of candy on my desk. A short while later I went to the grocery where, on my way down the aisle, I thought I might try sour gummy worms because they would look festive. So I picked some up, put them in the cart, and earlier today I dumped a bag into the receptacle on my desk. But, Davidson also insists, "there are no strict laws relating events under physical descriptions with events under mental descriptions" (Davidson 2005: 204). Davidson maintains this second point because, as we've seen, it is impossible to eliminate the normative component from our talk of rational action. Churchland asks us to "consider a familiar example: a ripe peach, bitten into and savored. As the juice hits the receptors on the tongue, it affects their levels of excitation . . . Any peach, at a comparable stage of maturity, will produce almost exactly the same pattern of activation" (Churchland 1995: 21- 22). Even if we grant him the validity of this point and everything else about vector coding and processing in neural networks, what

counts as "ripe" and what the biter does as a result of all those excited recep-tors, will elude him.[9] We are all, at least potentially, like the capsicum sensitive Sharon or Fuschia Dunlop's Chinese chefs.

The short route to a conclusion about what cognitive science can tell us about religion, then, might be to examine the index. If you find therein much mention of "folk psychology," "cognitive systems," "formation rules," and the like then we might as well "commit it then to the flames; for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" (Hume 1902: 165). But that seems unfair. We ought at least to take a look at one example. Fortunately, over the last couple of decades Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley have collaborated on an approach to religion that relies heavily on cognitive science. Rather than survey the entire corpus, I shall concentrate on their first collaborative volume, from 1990, and their more recent volume, which appeared in 2002. If, as I will argue, the first has serious flaws which are repeated in the more recent work, this would seem to count as a degenerate research program, with little claim on our continued interest.

It's worth noting at the outset those areas where I do not think I disagree with Lawson and McCauley. In chapter one of *Rethinking Religion* they reject both the "protectionist" strategy that insulates religion from critical analysis and the "reductionist" impulse that the only explanation of religion is one that can boil it down to nothing more than a by-product of social or psychological forces. The former they identify in Eliade and Otto (McCauley & Lawson 1990: 13-14), but it goes back at least to Schleiermacher's *Speeches* and the claim that religion "stops with the immediate experiences of the existence and action of the universe, with the individual intuitions and feelings; each of these is a self-contained work without connections with others or dependence upon them" (Schleiermacher 1996: 26).[10]

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[9] I am not saying that we could not learn to speak a language in which talking about what we see, taste, and smell in terms of "neural networks." But to be adequate for discussing the full spectrum of human acts and emotions it would need to duplicate our current mental language as well. But this would reproduce the problem of norms and reasons and as a result wouldn't be much of an improvement. If it left out the mental, then perhaps it could be formulated in terms of strict laws, but they wouldn't be laws that could explain rational human actions. I take it that this is Davidson's point when he writes that, "I can imagine a science concerned with how people think and act purged of 'folk psychology', but I cannot think in what its interest would consist" (Davidson 2001: 25).

[10] Schleiermacher comes in for considerable criticism by Otto (1950), but that shouldn't obscure the unity of their interests as opposed to the rambunctious and anti-religious empiricism

While the principal target of Schleiermacher's *On Religion* is the critical philosophy of Kant, Hume stands, if ambivalently, in the background.[11] The conclusion to the first *Inquiry*, which I paraphrased above, is directed as much against the theologians as the metaphysicians, despite the seeming toleration of Divinity that precedes it. Hume's disdain for religion received public notice from the 1740s on and there is no reason not to take Philo's pronouncement on the "religious spirit" that "no time can be happier or more prosperous than those in which it is never regarded or heard of" (Hume 1998: 82), as that of Hume himself.[12] Despite his seeming concession to believers, who are not in conflict with science because "the sentences which the theist uses to express such 'truths' are not literally significant" (Ayer 1946: 118), I take A. J. Ayer to be the direct descendant of Hume when he concludes that:

> The fact that people have religious experiences is interesting from the psychological point of view, but it does not in any way imply that there is such a thing as religious knowledge... those philosophers who fill their books with assertions that they intuitively "know" this or that moral or religious "truth" are merely providing material for the psycho-analyst (1946: 119-120).

Likeminded contemporaries are legion. They continue to embarrass their more thoughtful colleagues in the sciences by decrying the fact that well-credentialed scientists continue to believe in God. Among students of religion, Hans Penner seems to represent this tradition, at least when he writes that "Once we reject the theory of the "given"... we are forced back to a fundamental principle—sentence meaning is literal meaning. Adopting that principle from within a holistic theory, we can conclude that myth and ritual do indeed entail

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that characterizes the tradition from Hume to Ayer. Karl Barth recognized this continuity when, as a student in Berlin, he bought himself "a copy of Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*, in the edition by R. Otto, which I still use. Eureka! Having apparently sought for "The Immediate," I had now found it" (Barth 1991: 68). I take Otto's criticisms of Schleiermacher to be of the same, internecine sort as Eliade's criticisms of Otto, which begin *The Sacred and the Profane* (Eliade 1959: 8-10).

[11] Mossner reports that Hume's *Collected Works* were published in Germany in 1754-56 and that "when J. A. Trinius's *Freydenker Lexicon* was published in Leipzig in 1759, five pages were devoted to the bibliography of David Hume and the replies to him (Mossner 1954: 227-228). Haman, according to Richard Popkin, became so excited on reading Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, that "he translated the first and last dialogues into German so that Immanuel Kant might read them and become a serious Christian" (Hume 1998: xv). Whatever he knew of Hume's work directly, Schleiermacher was aware of *Jacobi's David Hume on Belief; or Idealism and Realism* (Schleiermacher 1996: xxiii-xxiv).

[12] I have tried to elaborate the ironic reading of *Dialogues* XII in Davis (1992).

information and the information is false" (Frankenberry 2002: 169).[13] Not only Sellars's attack on "the given," but the various critiques of empiricist presuppositions that run from Peirce and James, through Wittgenstein, to Quine, Goodman, and recent historians of science make it a matter of philosophical common sense to reject both sides of this question.

I'm also not going to question the various psychological experiments retailed by Lawson and McCauley, particularly in the more recent work (though I imagine I have a rather different take on their importance). Even the distinction between "interpretation" and "explanation," which drives the project, is one I can share, with only the addition of "description" as part of any approach to the study of human phenomena. But, on the basis of *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, this would seem to be a friendly addition, since they are happy to accept Fredrik Barth's presentation of Baktaman ritual at face value while disputing, at the level of explanation, whether the relevant forces are social or psychological. My only concern is with the insights provided by McCauley and Larson's approach to ritual.

In attempting to articulate a cognitive approach to religion, and specifically religious ritual, McCauley and Lawson emphasis the "analogy with language" and argue for "the promise of the competence approach to theorizing as a means of generating theories for the study of religious ritual systems— looking at the work of Chomsky and Sperber for inspiration" (McCauley and Lawson 1990: 170-171). By the "competence approach" they mean formulating and testing "theories about the cognitive representations that an idealized participant's implicit knowledge about such systems suggests" (McCauley and Lawson 1990: 2). Such systems characteristically: 1) "Involve symbolic phenomena;" 2) "are usually not explicitly codified;" 3) "are relatively restricted both in their use and in their transmission;" 4) "typically, are not explicitly taught;" and 5) "require that participants must have some form of explicit knowledge" (McCauley and Lawson 1990: 2-3). The goal is to make this knowledge explicit. They do so by attempting to specify the building blocks of a language and the rules that must go into the regular production of well-formed instances of linguistic behavior. The idea goes back at least to Chomsky's famous review of Skinner's *Verbal Behavior* (Chomsky 1959).

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[13] I qualify my inclusion of Penner here because it is unclear what the scope of "entail" is in this passage. If all he means is that on Davidson's way of accounting for meaning, people should mostly be taken to believe what they say they believe in, I take it that we agree. But no reasonable semantic theory, and certainly not Davidson's approach to language, can entail that any particular beliefs, or the sentences by which people communicate them, are false.

While McCauley and Lawson don't argue the point, Chomsky's thesis rests on the systematic critique of the theoretical adequacy of the entire vocabulary of behaviorism. Thus, "We are no doubt to interpret the terms 'strength' and 'probability' in this context as paraphrases of more familiar locutions such as 'justified belief' or 'warranted assertability'... or that 'our belief in what someone tells us is similarly a function of, or identical with, our tendency to act upon the verbal stimuli which he provides'" (Chomsky 1959: 35). These and other functional equivalents result in the original linguistic products losing whatever claim on objectivity they appeared to carry (Chomsky 1959: 36). While "reinforcement" and the rest of the conceptual arsenal Skinner deploys are "important factors" in language acquisition, Chomsky insists that they are inadequate without understanding "the remarkable capacity of the child to generalize, hypothesize, and 'process information' in a variety of very special and apparently highly complex ways which we cannot yet describe or begin to understand, and which may be largely innate, or may develop through some sort of learning or through maturation of the nervous system" (Chomsky 1959: 43). These innate processing abilities become the object of Chomsky's subsequent research program. The formal models of deep structure are supposed to represent the processes, presumably instantiated in some sort of neural matrix, which make language acquisition and use possible. McCauley and Lawson's embrace of this program, at least in its broadest outlines, stretches from their early work to their most recent, where they reaffirm that "the forces on which we are concentrating are *psychological* rather than social" (2002: 72-73) and that the explanation of these psychological forces is ultimately to be found in "the possible neural underpinnings for such a system" (2002: 77).

Until those neural underpinnings are disclosed by the march of neuroscience, investigators must content themselves with constructing ever more subtle models that can be tested for their adequacy in displaying those neural systems. This is the role played by the various figures and formation rules that first appear in chapter five of *Rethinking Religion.* A rather different sort of figure predominates in *Bringing Ritual to Mind*, but the point is the same: To give visual form to psychic processes which are ultimately rooted in the neurobiology of the human mind. In this, as they readily admit, McCauley and Lawson are following the methodological lead of Churchland and likeminded philosophers (McCauley and Lawson 1990: 145). But while the neurology may be in the future, McCauley and Lawson think that the application of this method to religious ritual yields some interesting results.

As they present it, "the conceptual system of the religion stipulates what will count as appropriate ritual acts and what entities constitute possible ritual

agents and possible ritual objects" (McCauley and Lawson 1990: 162). Whatever their specific properties, it is crucial to properly religious ritual that the central players be superhuman agents.[14] The relative distance of the CPS-agents from a particular ritual type influences intensity, repeatability, and revisability. They identify a number of universals, both substantive and functional, and apply the whole to several disparate rituals.

The problem, of course, is determining whether any of this actually throws light on the sorts of phenomena students and philosophers of religion are actually interested in. It is not clear to me that their figures illustrate much beyond what could be gleaned from a simple description of the rituals themselves, but that may just be a failure on my part. The more important question is whether, even if we accept the centrality of CPS-agents, they identify any constraints on religious ritual that go beyond the common sense generalizations available to any student of the rituals discussed. To the extent that McCauley and Lawson embrace the method and presuppositions of Churchland, they will also have the difficulty with the normative component of propositional attitudes. One consequence of this, as noted above, will be an inescapably historical component to the complete account (assuming that there is a complete account) of a particular ritual within a particular tradition. This, in turn, puts a serious constraint upon the generalizability of the theory. In other words, their account will always have to include the caveat, "this is a general theory of religious ritual except for those parts that are historically unique to the particular practice of particular rituals at particular times." This, I take it, makes the purported theory less than compelling.

It seems, at least at one point, that McCauley and Lawson are aware of the problem, for in discussing a set of Zulu rituals they note that "Since the time of Shaka a young man could not marry until the formation of his regiment during the ukubuthwa. Apparently, Shaka introduced this ritual in order to supersede the rituals of the earlier circumcision lodges and to circumvent thereby the distractions from military responsibilities those rituals provoked" (1990: 117). They go on to predict the weak status of the CPS-agent, "his ritual is *unlikely* to be a fundamental ritual in the Zulu religious system" (1990: 121). Not only does this tacitly import a normative judgment that is otherwise unjustified, but it misses the more important implication of the

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[14] In *Bringing Ritual to Mind* they explicate the social origins of specific traditions by introducing the phrase "culturally postulated superhuman agents (CPS-agents hereafter)" (McCauley and Lawson 2002: 8) and I will use their abbreviation henceforth.

example. If it is possible to reorganize a ritual system for local purposes, motivated by non-religious goals, and have that ritual become any persistent part of the tradition—Shaka died, after all, in 1828—then any purported universals constrain ritual only in the weakest possible way. Again, this doesn't recommend the proposal as having much by way of explanatory force.

But Lawson and McCauley have a more serious problem in their recent work. *Bringing Ritual to Mind* opens with the acknowledgement that "the critical test of any theory's sturdiness is its ability to stand up to the empirical evidence" (2002: x). The competition against which they pit their approach is the ethnography of Fredrik Barth and Harvey Whitehouse, both of whom worked in New Guinea, though with communities separated by both time and distance.[15] While the attempt to apply their approach to new cultures and to test it against alternative readings is surely laudable, they not only fail to confront the theoretical problem of unpredictable local innovation, their interest in deploying psychological theory leads them to misrepresent the issues posed by cargo cults and other millenarian movements.

Chapter 27 of Barth's *Ritual and Knowledge among the Baktaman* takes up the question of innovation in Baktaman practice. He identifies nine instances of attempted innovation, three during the time of his fieldwork "and all of them have taken place within the memory of [his informant] Ngromnok, i.e. over the last c. 20 years" (Barth 1975: 240). McCauley and Lawson refer to this passage twice (2002: 71 & 83), but they clearly do not think that the details have any theoretical bearing on their work. But the attempted innovations, and Barth's comments, are telling. A particularly interesting one concerns an "attempt to change the rules regarding wild male pig." Barth writes that:

> Baktaman taboos are particularly restrictive in limiting such meat to 7th grade initiates; all western neighbors allow it from 4th grade. About 10 years ago a group of

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[15] Barth's work with the Baktaman, a group numbering less than 200, living in the central mountain range of New Guinea, goes back to 1967-1968 (Barth 1975: 6-27). Whitehouse worked in the northeastern section of the island of New Britain, to the east of New Guinea. His time among the Pomio and Baining stretched from 1987 to 1989 (Whitehouse 1995: 1-13). It is only appropriate to note that McCauley and Lawson devote a considerable amount of their discussion to Barth's later, more theoretical reflections on his fieldwork, *Cosmologies in the Making: A Generative Approach to Cultural Variation in Inner New Guinea.* I've already noted, however, that McCauley and Lawson contrast their "psychological" approach to Barth's "social" one (2002: 72-73), so Barth's account does not have the same relation to Davidson's anomalous monism as McCauley and Lawson's neuro-cognitivism.

> Baktaman novices, visiting the village of the Wokfiakmin to the S.W. for 4th degree initiations, adopted the local rules and ate wild male pig when they were there. Subsequent to their return to Baktaman, the taro failed; and Baktaman seniors see this as vindication that the taboo is the will of *their* ancestors, though other ancestors are different (1975: 240).

There are three points to note here. First, Barth notes that despite the Baktaman insistence on the restriction that "there does not seem to be anything particularly apposite about associating the beast with the *Amowkam*, and rather better reason to connect a man's competence to eat it with his ascent to full virility at 4th degree *Mafom* initiation" (1975: 240). The neighbors eat; the Baktaman don't. There is no structural or symbolic reason not to. There is precedent for allowing it. Whatever the reason, beyond "the ancestors said so," it seems to be part of lost local history and irrelevant to the then current practice.

Second, had the group in question had a different makeup, or visited at a different time, there is no reason to believe the issue would have been raised when it was. Seventh degree Baktaman initiates would have eaten and would not necessarily have had any reason to push for a change in the rules. The rule might have remained in place, but only as a result of the accidents of time and travel; ritual diagrams such as those provided in *Rethinking Religion* would have had no explanatory import one way or another.

Finally, had the taro not failed, we would have had no sure knowledge of what might have happened. The elders might have put forward another reason to restrict the consumption of wild male pig, the lower degree initiates might have succeeded in making the change and preserving it, or the change might have been made and later rescinded. Another attempted innovation shows that the last is at least an option. Their western neighbors believe that various white worms and grubs:

> are bad for first degree novices; but the Baktaman taboo extends till 6th degree. There was recently a major move among young men to change this by adopting the western fashion and many men of the (b) set started eating such grubs, which are regarded as a delicacy; but the worms subsequently attacked the taro and the taboo was reinstated (1975: 241).

Presumably, had the taro not been attacked, the innovation could have stood. As it happens, one of the innovations that did become permanent involved 6th degree initiation. Kimebnok, the cult leader, "argued persistently that he wanted to 'show' the novice set as much as possible, while most of the seniors

strongly advocated the more exclusive style" (1975, 91). Kimebnok prevailed, despite the fact that this seems to be the sort of CPS-agent ritual with high sensory pageantry that McCauley and Lawson suggest should be comparatively difficult to change.[16]

Barth concludes that "the purported criteria by which innovations are evaluated by the Baktaman seem to be pragmatic" (1975: 244). Whether they recognize the problem or not, McCauley and Lawson cannot agree with Barth. If both innovations and objections are pragmatic, then the constraints on ritual form are neither neurological nor universal. But without the claim to some degree of universality, grounded in basic human neurology, the claim that they are pursuing "scientific explanation" (1990: 26) of the phenomena of religion falls flat. Since Barth's assessment seems to be born out by the facts, I'm afraid that McCauley and Lawson are in trouble.

Still more problems loom when they turn to Whitehouse, whose study focuses on a splinter group of the Mali Baining in eastern New Britain, "virtually all of whom were members of the Pomio Kivung" (Whitehouse 1995: 6). "Pomio Kivung" means "meeting of the Pomio people," a generic name for various peoples of south-west New Britain, though it "is a larger phenomenon than its name suggests. In addition to its many Pomio supporters, it has loyal followers to the north, extending deeply among the Mali Baining" (1995: 1). According to Whitehouse's sources, the movement dates back to 1963, with the emergence of a divine leader, Michael Koriam Urekit, who seems to have combined aspects of earlier millenarian movements or "cargo cults" with grassroots political activism, particularly directed to achieving local self-government. "The anticipated arrival of self-government," writes Whitehouse:

> has always been construed as an essentially supernatural event. The 'government' itself is said to exist already on a transcendental plane. In the early days of the movement it seems that this government was referred to as the 'Ancestral Council' (*Kaunsel Tumbuna*), but by the time of my fieldwork in the 1980s it was generally known as the 'Village Government' (*Vilij Gavman*) (1995: 41-43).

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[16] The qualifications here are intended to register my uncertainty about what ultimately counts as an agent, patient, or instrument, for McCauley and Lawson. In the interest of space and time I have left out these distinctions and the way they work in the theory. In part, I confess, I do so because ploys such as the "object agency filter" (1990: 88) seem to me *ad hoc* creations designed to protect some component of the theory. This is a sign of a degenerate research program. But little rests on whether 6th degree initiation is agent, patient, or instrument ritual; the main criticism remains the inability of the theory to deal with innovation in a credible way.

The Village Government is expected to arrive at some, not too distant, moment, at which time full autonomy will be established and good things will flow to the people from "foreign investors" who will be the ancestors disguised as Europeans (1995: 43).

Shortly before the arrival of Whitehouse and his wife, a movement had arisen among the Mali Baining that proclaimed the imminent arrival of the Village Government and the need of the people to prepare for this transforming event. McCauley and Lawson focus on the ritual innovations introduced by the leaders of this movement during its brief life, between August 1987 and October 1988, after which the members of the group were reabsorbed into the mainstream of Mali Baining Pomio Kivung. McCauley and Lawson investigate "the evolution of the overall ritual system of the Dadul-Maranagi splinter group" in order to demonstrate "that—unlike the ritual frequency hypothesis—the ritual form hypothesis not only correctly predicts the ritual arrangements… it also makes some sense of the underlying evolutionary trends" (2002: 157-158). In particular, they argue that a system such as the mainstream Povio Kivung, which rely on the frequent and regular repetition of rituals low in excitement and "sensory pageantry" is "an *unbalanced system. Sooner or later such systems will* induce boredom. Such ritual tedium will provoke creative reactions sufficient to spring ritual systems out of this position. Those reactions will generate enough energy to break the ritual systems free from the first attractor [frequency]" (2002: 184). Put simply, but not, I hope, unfairly, the thesis is that the low key frequency of Povio Kivung ritual tripped the "tedium effect," which led to the rise of the splinter group. In order to break free from the boredom of the mainstream system, the leaders of the break away group introduced new and even more frequent rituals which, contrary to Whitehouse's theory, also increased in sensory pageantry. Unlike Whitehouse, McCauley and Lawson predict that the emotional excitement necessary to break out from boredom requires a rise in ever more intense "special agent rituals." The failure of the ancestors to appear provokes ever more intense new rituals until the situation breaks the "sensory overload ceiling. There seems no doubt," they write:

> that this is just where the Dadul-Maranagi splinter group was heading, but external intervention precipitated the group's crash not long before it would have punctured the sensory overload ceiling. Our suggestion is that even if the government health inspector had not intervened, the psychological dynamics we have discussed reveal how the internal developments of the Dadul-Maranagi splinter group would have produced the same result anyway (2002: 194-195).

McCauley and Lawson conclude that theirs is the stronger theory.

That so much of this rests on speculation and stipulation is problematic enough, but I want to focus on an apparent confusion about what explains what. Consider the following remark, which has McCauley and Lawson trying to put the 1987-1988 incident into the larger context of recurrent enthusiastic[17] movements among the Povio Kivung. "Apparently, during each of these episodes the salient goal was to entice the ancestors' return. For the two of these episodes for which Whitehouse provides detailed information about the evolution of ritual patterns, the pivotal new special agent ritual, viz., the vigil, ends up being repeated because of the ancestors' refusal to cooperate" (2002: 197). All of the activities of the splinter group are undertaken either at the insistence of the ancestors or in response to their failure to respond. Whitehouse's account suggests that not only the rituals, but the surrounding actions as well, are responses to demoralization, anxiety, and unexpected events. Thus Whitehouse writes that, "at the end of August 1988 Baninge told me that demoralization could destroy the splinter group unless a credible programme to prepare for the ancestors was set in motion" (Whitehouse 1995: 129). In response to the possession of Lagawop, the third week in September, "a secret meeting occurred in Baninge's father's house . . . There was a general feeling that she may be suffering from Satanic delusions" (1995: 147). Just a week before the movement was dispersed by the health inspector, Whitehouse's "interviews with almost every adult in Dadul that day revealed that the people were frightened to risk exclusion from the miracle now that they had invested so many resources in the pursuit of it" (1995: 149). If Whitehouse's reports are correct, it is not clear what role McCauley and Lawson's theory has in explaining events. More to the point, they do not seem to notice that the reason they report for the rituals, together with Whitehouse's ethnography, constitute by themselves an alternative explanation for the evolution, such as it is, of splinter group ritual. Exactly why Tatonka and Baninge, the leaders of the movement,

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[17] I use this term in its technical sense as "a label for a tendency . . . to be more attentive to the guidance (directly felt, they would tell you) of the Holy Spirit . . . Always the first fervours evaporate; prophecy dies out, and the charismatic is merged in the institutional. 'The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard'—it is a fugal melody that runs through the centuries" (Knox 1950: 1). In addition to Knox, it's worth reading Worsley (1957), Burridge (1960, 1969), Cohn (1970), Gager (1975), and McGinn (1979) for reflections on millenarian and related movements by Bible scholars and historians of medieval and early modern Christianity, in addition to anthropologists working in Melanesia. Whitehouse cites a few more recent studies; McCauley and Lawson do not.

emerged when they did may be uncertain, but nothing suggests boredom as a cause or motive.[18]

Conclusion

If the work of Donald Davidson is "post-analytic," and if this "post-analytic" turn is to have any import for students of religion, then it should it should have some strong implications for the ways in which religion can and should be studied. I have argued that Davidson's argument for the primacy of the ideolect implies not just that radical translation begins at home, but that our account of action and rationality will always involve norms that are locally learned. This leads directly to anomalous monism which, in turn, suggests serious limits for any universal science of the mind. Almost 40 years ago Quine wrote, in response to Chomsky, that:

> Chomsky rightly notes my *penchant* for innate ideas. Rightly, anyway, if we construe 'innate ideas' in terms of innate dispositions to overt behavior... Language aptitude is innate; language learning, on the other hand, in which that aptitude is put to work, turns on intersubjectively observable features of human behavior and its environing circumstances, there being no innate language and no telepathy (Davidson & Hintikka 1969: 306).

Davidson agrees, adding only that observing something to be *human* behavior itself requires having learned language from at least one other person and thus being in a position to attempt, using your own norms, to discern those of another in action and speech. This, in turn, means admitting there is no neutral vantage point from which questions of norms can be avoided.

Not only Chomsky's, but other attempts, such as that of Churchland, to escape the norms we bring to interpretation will either end up smuggling those norms in the back door or contenting themselves with findings that aren't of much interest in interpreting most human activities. This extends,

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[18] In fact, the precipitating event seems to have been Tanotka's illness, brought on "while participating in a small drinking party" (Whitehouse 1995: 90). He goes to Baninge's house because Baninge is his "classificatory brother" and Baninge's diagnosis of possession results from his interpretation of Tanotka's ramblings (Whitehouse 1995: 91). This is not to say that I am endorsing Whitehouse's emphasis on "routinization." At least some of the historians who test Whitehouse's approach against their own research find his theory suspect (see Whitehouse & Martin 2004: chaps. 8 & 9).

finally, to the "cognitivism" of McCauley and Lawson. Where they occasionally have something interesting to say, their cognitivism doesn't figure in; where it does, what they say has, at best, not much to contribute and, at its worst, blinds them to the relevant evidence. That they continue to refine their position, despite the limited results, is the sign of a degenerate research program. This, I submit, gives us little incentive to continue monitoring their results.

If reading Davidson, or any thinker, provides compelling grounds for freeing ourselves from the compulsion to read everything, so much the better. This is real progress. Of course, I haven't provided an alternative theory or method for studying religion; I'm not sure I have one, beyond the pragmatic pluralism that enjoins us to read anything that seems promising and to pursue any vein that might have a chance of furthering the path of inquiry. But elaborating that particular stance is beyond the scope of the present project.

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