



# The Dawn of Self-Consciousness

## Consciousness

Consciousness is a function of the human mind that involves metaphors or symbols of reality. These symbols are visual (eyes), auditory (ears) and lexical (words) representations of the “real” world, and they reflect mankind’s interaction with the real world.<sup>1</sup>

## God-Consciousness

About 12,000 years ago (10,000 BCE) God endowed mankind with god-consciousness. Human will and authority were represented by the *symbolic* appearance and voice of “god,” expressed by the right brain (left brain in left-handed people). Innovative actions of mankind were initiated through possessive commands and instructions from this unique god-consciousness.<sup>2</sup> Under this impetus, mankind began the historic move from hunting and gathering to domesticating plants and animals.<sup>3</sup> This meant that mankind could develop a more sedentary culture, with greater population density and closer interaction among human beings. By 4000 BCE there was extensive trade between peoples, and this was accompanied by urban settlements for central storage, exchange and control. Writing evolved because of the necessity to record transactions.

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## “Other”-Consciousness

Meanwhile, there emerged a consciousness of “otherness” — of distinctions between peoples. Generally, those who became aware of “otherness” felt increasingly deprived of their own authoritative god-consciousness. Fearing that “otherness” competed with god-consciousness, they thought it necessary to

control or eliminate the “other” as a threat to “divine” authority. Thus, as god-consciousness receded, *they developed oppressive power structures as their own authoritative manifestation of god.*<sup>4</sup> These controlling power structures inevitably led to violence, and this violence extended possessive domestication beyond plants and animals to “other” human beings. Wars, sacrificial systems and supposed justice were used to suppress, enslave and exterminate “otherness” and to deify oppressive power structures.<sup>5,6</sup> Under this domesticating influence, the monumental civilizations of Mesoamerica, the Far East and the Middle East emerged. By the middle of the second millennium BCE, mankind had determined to *itself* become the human manifestation of god. It was then that natural catastrophe virtually obliterated the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern civilizations. This period of upheaval has been called the Great Dark Age (1200-1000 BCE).<sup>7-9</sup>

## Emerging Self-Consciousness

In the aftermath of natural catastrophe, God terminated god-consciousness (1000 BCE).<sup>10</sup> The symbolic voice and appearance of “god” no longer appeared in the mind — except in individuals with anomalies such as autism, epilepsy, schizophrenia or other brain disorders. The end of god-consciousness was almost universally mistaken as the “Fall” of mankind and estrangement from God.<sup>11</sup> In retrospect, however, it can be seen that God’s true intention was to inaugurate the “rise” of mankind to human self-consciousness. Instead of the human will’s being represented by the symbolic voice and appearance of a *possessive* god-consciousness, mankind was to exercise the gift of a personal will that could *relate* to “otherness” with purpose and responsibility.

However, mankind tragically equated *relational* self-consciousness with earlier *possessive* god-consciousness. Thus, assuming its own “authoritative” deification, mankind again began to suppress and dispossess the “other.” And all this despite the fact that consciousness of the self cannot exist apart from an awareness of

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“otherness”! As Near Eastern civilizations recovered from the Great Dark Age, they again worshiped the gods as the projection of their own possessive power structures. The Philistines restored the fish god, Dagon. The Moabites adopted the fire god, Chemosh. The Ammonites and Phoenicians elevated Moloch (the “Counselor”). And the Canaanites exalted Baal (the “Owner”). In mankind’s new “fallenness,” possession again became nine-tenths of the law.

## Relational Self-Consciousness

In the midst of this cultural darkness, there emerged a single ray of light. Among the Habiru, who fled to the Judean hills, the tribal chieftain, David, appeared about 1000 BCE. David was the first recorded human being to exhibit genuine self-consciousness. “. . . [T]he Psalms . . . are filled with *I*’s: the *I* of repentance, the *I* of anger and vengeance, the *I* of self-pity and self-doubt, the *I* of

despair, the *I* of delight, the *I* of ecstasy.”<sup>12</sup> For David this new self-consciousness was implicitly based on a number of fundamental premises:

1. The “self” and its consciousness must not be confused with previous god-consciousness.
2. The “other” is not to be regarded as the enemy but as the necessary ground for the “self.” “Our selves . . . [are] constituted by . . . our [conscious] communication with others. . . . [Indeed,] the [s]elf is always [o]ther and the [o]ther is always [s]elf.”<sup>13</sup>
3. Both the “self” and the “other” are aware of each other and are held in relationship by God, who is the “Third Voice.” As the authoritative reference, however, God is presently hidden from our consciousness. If he were not hidden, the One who is assumed to be other than human would intimidate mankind and inhibit a human relationship.
4. God has therefore hidden himself from human consciousness in order that mankind might become open, free and responsible human beings.
5. Though hidden, God the Creator is always present to us, for us and with us.

## The Tetrateuch

There is mounting evidence that David gathered a team of scholars to draft the Tetrateuch — Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers. Assembling existing records, oral traditions and legends, David engaged in the very first effort to address relational self-consciousness.<sup>14</sup> The Tetrateuch was intended to overturn the prevailing assumptions about the end of god-consciousness and the beginning of self-consciousness. Over against the conviction that the gods had dispossessed mankind, David was determined to show that God had granted mankind self-consciousness so that humanity could relate to each other through the authoritative “Third Voice” of God himself.

In developing this theme, David introduced the monumental advance of a *historical* perspective, since *relational* self-consciousness requires the relationality of time and space, cause and effect, before and after, and thus sequential events with past, present and future. David and his scholars began with two separate and distinct accounts of Creation:

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1. The first account, or *thesis*, from Genesis 1:1 to Genesis 2:4a, presents Creation from a positive perspective as a continuing upward creative movement toward God’s establishment of an authoritative relationship with Adam and Eve.
2. The second account (*antithesis*), beginning with Genesis 2:4b, presents God’s continuing Creation (*creatio continua*) from mankind’s negative perspective as a progressive and possessive downward fall. This “Fall” involves Adam and Eve’s partaking of the forbidden fruit, Cain’s murder of his brother, Abel, the “mighty men” filling the earth with violence, the Flood and subsequent curse upon Canaan, and the attempt to build a tower so that mankind might “make a name for themselves.”<sup>15,16</sup>

3. But the Tetrateuch also involves a third account (*synthesis*) of God's creative activity that traces his unconditional commitment to accomplish the intended relationality of mankind. In achieving this synthesis, David implicitly shows that God has employed — not a series of power structures — but a proleptic (anticipatory) succession of agents (christs or messiahs) to further his purpose. In the beginning there was Adam, who initially resisted the temptations of the serpent and of Eve. Then there was Noah, whom God used to save mankind from a universal Flood. There was Abraham, who led the Semitic Habiru from their homeland along the Hiddekel (Tigris) and Euphrates rivers in Mesopotamia to the future Promised Land and initiated their subsequent migration to the Nile delta of Egypt. Later there was Moses, whom God appointed to deliver his people from Egypt in the Great Dark Age and bring them back to the Promised Land.<sup>17</sup>

In using existing records, oral traditions and legends to trace the historical emergence of self-consciousness, David adopted the monotheism introduced by Pharaoh Akhenaten, who reigned with Queen Nefertiti at Amarna from 1353 to 1336 BCE.<sup>18</sup> However, while Akhenaten and Nefertiti believed that they alone were related to God, David extended God's

relationality to all mankind. The Davidic scholars then focused on the well-known desert god, YHWH.<sup>19</sup> Recent archeological investigations have disclosed over 140 stone sanctuaries to YHWH in the Negev and Sinaitic deserts. These Yahwistic sanctuaries, with stone pillars known as *masseboth*, date as early as the eleventh millennium BCE.<sup>20</sup> But "Yahweh was not merely the personified projection of the existing political system."<sup>21</sup> Unlike all other gods, YHWH was both "other"-conscious and self-conscious. YHWH was not a *possessive* god but the *relational* God of covenant.

Then, in David's Tetrateuchal account, Moses himself encounters the desert god, YHWH, and YHWH declares his name as "'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh" (Exodus 3:14). Recent scholarship has shown (1) that *'ehyeh* is derived from the Hebrew verb *hayah*, which has the triune meaning "to be, to become and to effect."<sup>22</sup> (2) The word *'asher* includes the sense of acting "because of and on behalf of." Thus, YHWH declares, "I will be, become, effect 'whatever is necessary for the needs and salvation of . . . [the selfhood and the otherness of my people].'"<sup>23,24</sup> This threefold declaration discloses YHWH as the One Triune God, with his own conscious selfhood defined by unconditional and covenantal relationality to, for and by the "other."

## The Decalogue

Next in David's account, YHWH actually delivers his people from enslavement to the Egyptian imperial power structures. At Mount Sinai YHWH gives the Chosen People the Ten Commandments (Decalogue).

It is critically important to understand the nature of these commandments:

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1. The Decalogue, like the Torah (Pentateuch = Tetrateuch plus Deuteronomy), is presented in the future tense.<sup>25</sup> This means that the commandments are fundamentally the promise of a created reality that is still “becoming.”
2. The commandments present YHWH himself as the authoritative and referential “Other” — e.g., “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image . . . You shall not take the name of the Lord your God [falsely] . . .” (Exodus 20:3-7). This explicitly excludes all dominating and possessive attempts by mankind to be the human manifestation of divinity.
3. The Torah sets forth the equality of mankind (Exodus 20:12-17).

The groundbreaking democratic ideals of the Torah are far in advance of the later, truncated democracy of the Greeks. Moshe Greenberg, an eminent Judaic scholar, has carefully explored this democratic theme:

. . . [Thus, i]n the divinely ordained polity provided for Israel, power is dispersed among the members of society and many devices prevent its accumulation and concentration. The society envisaged in the Torah lacks a strong, prestigious focus of power; on the contrary, dignity and authority are distributed. The prestige of parents is guaranteed in the Decalogue; a child who

injures them or rebels against them is liable to the death penalty (Exod 20:12, 21:15, 17; Deut 21:18-21). Every town (“gate”) in Israel has its tribunal of elders, authorized to judge and punish and even to inflict the death penalty (Deut 16:18, 22:15ff.). Insult to tribal chiefs is paired with insult to God: “You must not revile God or lay a curse upon a chief among your people” (Exod 22:27). No central government is recognized in the laws, except for an isolated paragraph in Deuteronomy that treats the monarchy . . . [and curbs] the king’s appetite for power and prestige. . . . Such a conception of a humble king seems paradoxical, if not quixotic. It is unparalleled in antiquity. . . .

Accumulation of economic power is also severely impeded by the laws of the Torah. The foundation of ancient economy being ownership of land, God grants the Israelites a land for their possession, but he conditions their continued tenancy on obedience to his laws. If in the future the people boastfully take the credit for their prosperity, saying, “My power and the might of my hand got me this wealth”; if, forgetting that “It is YHWH your God who has given you the power to get wealth,” they are disloyal to him, then they are told “you shall perish as did those nations that YHWH caused to perish before you” (Deut 8:17-20).

The correlate of God’s ownership of the land is the duty of the Israelites to reflect his benevolence in their tenancy of it. The weekly sabbath rest, for instance, instituted “so that your ox and your ass may rest and the son of your maidservant and the alien may be refreshed,” is in force even during the critical, busy seasons of plowing and harvest (Exod 23:12). Material considerations, which presumably are foremost in the mind of an enterprising farmer, may not prevail against God’s benign provision for the needy.

Furthermore, the Israelite must share the wealth gained from the land with unfortunate fellow citizens. The farmer is obliged to let the land lie fallow once in seven years, “so that the needy of your people may eat [its crop]; thus the sabbath [-yield] of the land shall serve to feed you and your manservant and your maidservant, your hireling, and the alien resident among you” (Lev 25:6; cf. Exod 23:11). The fullest realization of the idea that God owns the land — and a serious curb on economic initiative — is the jubilee, every fiftieth year, in which all sales of land (occasioned in ancient Israel by bankruptcy) are annulled and all real estate reverts to its original

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owner (who received it in accord with the divine allocation of the land of Canaan among the tribes of Israel at the time of the conquest). . . .

Similar dampening of economic enterprise and growth must result from the ban on interest, by which all loans are converted into charity; that is, money cannot be used to make money (Exod 22:24, Lev 25:35ff.). The rule that slaves must be emancipated after seven years or at the jubilee (Exod 21:2-6, Lev 25:25-28, Deut 15:12-18) prevents the accumulation of human capital, “for the Israelites are my slaves,” says God, “mine, whom I liberated from the land of Egypt” (Lev 25:55).

Add to these such provisions as the poor tithe (Deut 14:28-29), the septennial cancellation of debts (Deut 15:1-6), the injunction to lend money generously to the needy at no interest (Deut 15:7-11), and it emerges that the sometimes explicit purpose of the laws to assert God’s sovereignty and their implicit reflection of his attributes eventuate in measures that distribute material resources among the people with a clear tendency toward equalization. A focus of human power to rival that of God is precluded. . . .

The promulgation of the Torah . . . is . . . the basis of the common responsibility of each for all (e.g., the collective penalty imposed on the community that failed to prosecute a notorious idolater, Lev 20:4-5). But at the same time it implicitly heightens the worth and weight of the individual: by imparting information to her or him, both individual accountability and individual power are increased. Duties toward others are matched by the rights she or he may claim from others. Knowing the boundaries set by God to human authorities makes it impossible for the ruler to assert an absolute sway over the individual. Both are ultimately subject to the same divine sovereign whose laws are designed to keep all humans conscious of their creaturehood.

In its aversion to the concentration of power and its tendency to equalize resources among the citizenry, the system of biblical law resembles democracy. It resembles it, too, in the aspiration to create a society united voluntarily around shared values, in whose achievement all are called on to participate and share responsibility. It resembles it, finally, in its regard for the individual, whose freedom, person, and property it protects with a solicitude unparalleled in ancient societies.<sup>26</sup>

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## Summary of Developments

In the Tetrateuch the Davidic scholars determined to portray human selfhood, not as a possession, but as a relational consequence of the “otherness” of God himself and of other beings. Furthermore, conscious human selfhood was still in process of “becoming.” YHWH himself determined to constitute such selfhood through ultimate, universal and relational equality among human beings. In instituting democratic biblical law, YHWH therefore moved mankind from the perverse darkness of predatory (possessive) power structures to the dawn of mankind’s self-conscious relationality with God, with each other and, consequently, with oneself.

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## Notes and References

1. See Julian Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990), p. 55.
2. See *ibid.*, pp. 144-145.

3. See Emily Sohn, "The Long Search for Dinner," *U.S. News & World Report*, 18 June 2001, pp. 44-45.
4. See George Mendenhall, "The Suzerainty Treaty Structure: Thirty Years Later," in Edwin R. Firmage, Bernard G. Weiss and John W. Welch, eds., *Religion and Law: Biblical-Judaic and Islamic Perspectives* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), pp. 85-100.
5. See Karl W. Luckert, *Egyptian Light and Hebrew Fire: Theological and Philosophical Roots of Christendom in Evolutionary Perspective* (Albany, NY: State of University of New York Press, 1991).
6. See Gil Bailie, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1997).
7. See Lee Huddleston, The Emergence of Civilizations to 500 BCE, at [www.thehallofmaat.com/maat/article.php?sid=63](http://www.thehallofmaat.com/maat/article.php?sid=63).
8. See Benny J. Peiser, "Comets and Disaster in the Bronze Age," *British Archaeology*, no. 20 (Dec. 1997): 6-7, at [www.knowledge.co.uk/sis/ba9712bp.htm](http://www.knowledge.co.uk/sis/ba9712bp.htm).
9. See Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*, pp. 212-214.
10. See *ibid.*, p. 294.
11. See *ibid.*, pp. 299, 444.
12. Thomas Cahill, *The Gifts of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), p. 93.
13. David S. Cunningham, *These Three Are One: The Practice of Trinitarian Theology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), pp. 200, 271.
14. See Gary A. Rendsburg, "Reading David in Genesis: How We Know the Torah Was Written in the Tenth Century B.C.E.," *Bible Review* 17, no. 1 (Feb. 2001): 20-33, 46.
15. See Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Genesis as Rashomon," *Bible Review* 17, no. 3 (June 2001): 26-33, 55.
16. See Cunningham, *These Three Are One*, p. 244.
17. See W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), pp. 50-51.
18. See Rick Gore, "Pharaohs of the Sun," *National Geographic* 199, no. 4 (April 2001): 34-57.
19. See Ephraim Stern, "Pagan Yahwism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27, no. 3 (May-June 2001): 20-29.
20. See Uzi Avner, "Sacred Stones in the Desert," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 27, no. 3 (May-June 2001): 30-41.
21. Mendenhall, "Suzerainty Treaty Structure," p. 90.
22. See Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1960), pp. 38-49.
23. Bill Burton, The Key to the Key of Knowledge, at [www.houseofstead.com/shofar/articles/article9.htm](http://www.houseofstead.com/shofar/articles/article9.htm).
24. Anonymous, Is His Name Jehovah or Yahweh? at [www.ynca.com/Mini%20Studies/ishisnam.htm](http://www.ynca.com/Mini%20Studies/ishisnam.htm).
25. See "Origins," *Outlook* (Sept. 2001).
26. Moshe Greenberg, "Biblical Attitudes toward Power: Ideal and Reality in Law and Prophets," in *Religion and Law*, pp. 101-125.