> overturns the basic contrast I outline. A person who believes in transmigration of the soul would argue that a human being does have more than one body, but not at any one moment in time. In some cultures we find a belief in possession or out-of-body experiences (especially mystic unity with a divinity), albeit as exceptional experiences noteworthy precisely because the human goes beyond the bounds of the normal human body. In any event, the ancient Near Eastern cultures under discussion here do not evince such beliefs, so that they posit the fundamental contrast between human and divine bodies.

As the next chapter will demonstrate, ancient Southwest Asian societies show clear evidence of such beliefs, as do modern societies, including those within which the scientific and philosophical frameworks of the Renaissance and Enlightenment are normative. Those beliefs are socioculturally mediated variations on the intuitive partibility of the body and of certain loci of agency. Even in contemporary English-speaking cultures we speak of people in terms of relationality, as well as "being a part of us," "taking a part of us with them," "being there in spirit," having their hearts in conflict with their brains, and in many other ways that reflect the underlying cognitive predispositions to relationality and the associated concepts of partibility and permeability, including—particularly in cases of deceased persons—inhabiting material media. The ability of ancient Southwest Asian deities to be present simultaneously in multiple different bodies is a difference of degrees, not of kind, that primarily emerges from widespread social demands for immediacy and presence, and from the conceptual flexibility of agents whose bodies are not otherwise available for scrutiny.

Assyriological and Hebrew Bible scholarship recognizes that these societies understood deities to in some way be able to inhabit material media and reify their presence through that media while the primary locus of their presence was understood to be located elsewhere. The scholarship also recognizes that this understanding seems to obtain in many different societies across time and space, suggesting there is some kind of underlying compulsion towards that conceptualization of deity and divine agency. A significant obstacle in this scholarship, however, is the tendency to rely for explanation on the many different emic rationalizations of those practices that emerge situationally (that is, they emerge in response to specific circumstances and situations) within the different societies in which they are found. This results in a tangled mess of accounts of deity and in the many different theoretical models that have been posited to explain the complexities of the sacred, the numinous, the hypostatic, and even of religion more broadly. This book offers a unifying theoretical framework that can account for that intuitive compulsion, can accommodate the diversity of explanations, and can also demonstrate the relationship of that intuitive compulsion to other phenomena associated with deity in the Hebrew Bible that are rarely recognized as such.