

either provided or developed prosocial mechanisms that made significant contributions to maintaining social cohesion within growing societies, allowing them to become increasingly large and complex (Slingerland, Henrich, and Norenzayan 2010; Norenzayan et al. 2016). According to this theoretical model, as these agents gained salience and influence within societies, they became more reliably linked with morality. Moralizing deities with greater access to strategic information and greater abilities to covertly monitor and to punish developed the most fitness within such cognitive ecologies. Regarding the mechanism for the origins of these deities, Norenzayan et al. (2016, 46) state, “They arise from modifications of preexisting beliefs and practices that over historical time become targets of cultural evolutionary selection pressures.” Rather than catalyzed by biological evolution (like our sensitivity to agency), the social salience of deity concepts is a product of their capacity to perform prosocial functions—to increase social cohesion and cooperation, allowing the society to continue to grow in size and complexity. The primary insight I want to draw from this model is that large-scale deity concepts, such as those found in the Hebrew Bible, tend to become or to remain salient because of their performance of prosocial functions such as offering access to strategic information, monitoring behavior, and punishing behavior that threatens social cohesion. This increases their adaptive fitness from the perspective of cultural evolution. Production of a deity concept based on individual sensitivity to agency, teleological reasoning, etc., is one thing, but the perseverance of that concept across a large and complex society for century after century is another entirely. “Optimal” deity concepts will satisfy both ends of this spectrum (cf. McNamara et al. 2021).

Another clue regarding the transition from unseen agency concept to socially-concerned deity is the observation that the emergence of these deities appears to follow *after* a society’s rituals become more frequent and standardized. From the perspective of Harvey Whitehouse’s (1992) “modes of religiosity” framework,<sup>91</sup> low-frequency, high-arousal “imagistic” ritual tends to give way with increased social size and complexity to high-frequency, low-arousal “doctrinal” ritual, which affords greater oversight and closer control through that growth (Whitehouse and Hodder 2010; Tsoraki 2018; Whitehouse 2021, 53–126). This is because the performance of higher-frequency ritual tends toward greater standardization and less tolerance for deviation, increasing the function of the rituals as costly signaling or as credibility enhancing displays, or CREDs (Henrich 2009; Liberman, Kinzler, and Woodward 2018). This reinforces group identity and aids in boundary maintenance, while also transmitting and embedding ideologies associated with that identity and its boundaries.<sup>92</sup> The cognitive,

<sup>91</sup> See also McCauley and Lawson 2002.

<sup>92</sup> Harvey Whitehouse and Ian Hodder (2010, 123) explain, “High-frequency ritual performances allow complex networks of ideas to be transmitted and stored in memory as