

While these insights help us better understand the cognitive processes involved in the production, elaboration, and transmission of deity concepts, it's not as simple as drawing a straight line from those cognitive processes to the biblical texts as we have them today. In addition to the fact that the Hebrew Bible represents the repeatedly edited and decontextualized writings of a tiny minority of members of elite scribal classes, they are overwhelmingly instruments of propaganda intended to further the authors' and editors' own rhetorical goals. As a result, they reflect carefully curated perspectives with a broad spectrum of proximities to actual lived experiences today. To more carefully bridge the gap between cognition and text, and to help navigate the complexities of biblical rhetoric, this book also incorporates insights from cognitive linguistics.

The foundational principle of cognitive linguistics is that language is not an autonomous faculty that operates independently of our cognition, but is one of many integrated functions *of* that cognition. In other words, language is not an independent tool we just pick up and manipulate. It originates in and is governed by our experiences within our cognitive ecologies—it is an outgrowth of our individual experiences with cognition.³⁰ Perhaps the most important insight that results from this principle is that linguistic meaning is contingent on our cumulative embodied experiences. We construct meaning from language because we have experience with usage in contexts, not because words, phrases, or sentences have inherent or autonomous semantic value. They do not. Words and texts have no inherent meaning. Meaning is generated in, and is confined to, the mind of the hearer, reader, or viewer, and based on the interpretive lenses their cumulative embodied experiences afford.

Among many other things, this insight helps us to better understand how what we consider theologically problematic biblical texts could be preserved by theologically sensitive editors and redactors. A text composed to communicate a perspective that later circumstances rendered theologically problematic need not necessarily be revised or excised in order to resolve the problem, since it carries no meaning independent of the hearers, readers, or viewers. As the shared texts of Judahite societies arrogated more and more authority, their alteration became an increasingly sensitive issue. All that was usually required to resolve theologically thorny issues, however, was for the consumers to bring interpretive frameworks to the text that facilitated an alternative reading. In many instances, powerful social institutions can propagate and enforce such alternative readings without making any changes to the texts at all, either by slightly revising entirely distinct texts, or by composing entirely new texts. As one example from the Christian scriptures, Jas 2:24 seems to represent a direct challenge to Rom 3:28. The author

³⁰ William Croft and D. Alan Cruse (2004, 3–4) explain, “categories and structures in semantics, syntax, morphology and phonology are built up from our cognition of specific utterances on specific occasions of use.”