

wrangled with those boundaries further clarifies the areas of contention and, when examined diachronically, the developmental trajectories of the concept. In this way, the universals of the structure and function of language can be used to fill in some of the sociomaterial gaps that have so frequently frustrated scholars and compelled us toward more presentistic assumptions and the imposition of anachronistic philosophical frameworks.

TERMS FOR DEITY IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

The three primary terms used to refer generically to deity across the Hebrew Bible are *'ēlōhîm*,⁸ *'ēl*,⁹ and *'ēlôha*.¹⁰ The most basic form from which these derive is *'ēl*, and Marvin Pope's conclusion from over sixty years ago will be our point of departure regarding its etymology: "the problem is philologically insoluble on the basis of the materials now at our disposal. The word *ilu*, *'ēl* is simply a primitive noun and as such cannot be further analyzed" (Pope 1955, 19).¹¹ These terms were lexicalized well before the isolation of Hebrew as a discrete language and their textualization in the traditions that would become the Hebrew Bible (cf. Sanders 2010, 103–55).

All three terms are used primarily with an appellative sense, which means they function as common nouns applicable to members of a given class. This can include a generic use (e.g., a mother, a prophet) or a titular sense (e.g., Mother, the Prophet). While YHWH is by far the most common referent of all three terms, and particularly when the titular sense is activated, the continued salience of the generic sense is demonstrated by the regular use of *'ēlōhîm* in reference to YHWH with pronominal suffices (984 occurrences, or 38 percent of all occurrences).¹² All three terms are also used in roughly synonymous ways in reference to the generic concept of deity (Burnett 2001, 54–57). For instance: *'ēlôhê nēkar*, "foreign deities" (Deut 31:16; Josh 24:20; Jer 5:19); *'ēl nēkār*, "a foreign deity" (Deut 32:12; Mal 2:11; Ps 81:10); *'ēlôha nēkār*, "a foreign deity" (Dan 11:39); *'ēlōhîm 'āhērîm*, "other deities" (Exod 20:3; Deut 5:7); *'ēl 'āhēr*, "another deity" (Exod 34:14); *lō' 'ēlōhîm*, "not deity" (Hos 8:6); *lō' 'ēl*, "not deity" (Deut 32:21;

⁸ About 2,600 occurrences (227 not in reference to YHWH, or 8.7 percent).

⁹ 237 occurrences (thirty-one not in reference to YHWH, or 13 percent).

¹⁰ Fifty-eight occurrences (eight not in reference to YHWH, or 13.7 percent).

¹¹ Burnett 2001, 2, n. 4; Wardlaw 2008, 92, n. 4; cf. Ringgren 1974, 273; Zimmermann 1962.

¹² Fifty-seven of those occurrences refer to deities other than YHWH. *'Ēl* occurs twelve times with a pronominal suffix, or in roughly 5 percent of occurrences. Nine occurrences are in the Psalms, and the only use in reference to a deity other than YHWH is in the exilic Isa 44:17 (*'ēlî*). *'Ēlôha* occurs once with a pronominal suffix in reference to generic deity (*'ēlôhō*, Hab 1:11).