

COMMUNICABLE AGENCY AND ANTHROPOMORPHISM. Two final domains of deity that should be briefly addressed are COMMUNICABLE AGENCY and ANTHROPOMORPHISM. Both seem to be presupposed in most evocations of deity concepts in the Hebrew Bible. The main profile associated with this domain would be “divine image.” While the Hebrew Bible’s rhetoric takes on a markedly polemical tone in Neo-Babylonian- and Achaemenid-period literature, and frequently placed the terminology for the material mediation of deity in the mouths of foreigners and apostate Israelites, some earlier references to cultic objects as deities seem natural and uncontroversial (e.g., Gen 35:4; Exod 20:23; 34:17; Judg 17:5[?]). The natural semantic fuzziness of the terms for deity may have facilitated the reinterpretation of problematic references so they escaped the editorial knife (Smith 2004a, 156–57; Reed 2020, 81). While anthropomorphic descriptions of deities other than YHWH are rare in the Hebrew Bible, when they are referenced, it is generally within the same conceptual frameworks used to describe YHWH’s own anthropomorphic activity, as in, for instance, Ps 82.

CONSTRUCTING THE DOMAINS

With these conceptual domains and their profiles identified, we can interrogate a passage from the Hebrew Bible and begin to reconstruct a rough approximation of a contemporary hearer/reader/viewer’s conceptualization of deity and divine agency. A helpful case study that is among the most thorough engagements in the Hebrew Bible with deities other than YHWH is Ps 82 (Parker 1995; Smith 2008, 131–39; Machinist 2011).⁵⁷ This text is additionally instructive because of its renegotiation of the role and function of those deities. I quote the psalm in full and follow with a cognitive-semantic interrogation of the conceptualizations of deity it could have evoked.

1 The deity [’*ēlōhīm*] takes his place in the divine council [*ba’ādat-’ēl*];
in the midst of the deities [*baqereb ’ēlōhīm*] he judges.

2 “How long will you judge iniquitously,
and show favoritism to the wicked? *Selah*.

3 Render justice for the poor and the orphan,
defend the rights of the afflicted and the destitute.

4 Rescue the poor and the needy,
deliver from the hand of the wicked.”

⁵⁷ I date the psalm to the Neo-Babylonian or Achaemenid period, based primarily on the psalm’s thorough integration into the narrative arcs of Pss 74–76 and 79–82, which address the loss of the temple. I argue Ps 82 is the very fulfillment of the petition in Ps 74:22 for the deity to “rise up” and plead their *rib* (McClellan 2018).