

Divine (Dis)embodiment as an Aspect of Divine Otherness in Philo of Alexandria

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One of the most influential ideas in Jewish and Christian history has been that the deity lacks a body. Despite the Bible's fascination with Yhwh's eyes, ears, hands, and other parts, most of its readers over the past two millennia have accepted the notion of a disembodied God, placing corporeal language for the deity in the category of metaphor, narrowly conceived,¹ even if tributary traditions within them (e.g., the Jewish *Shi'ur Qomah* texts) retain often exuberant bodily imagery for God, and hymns and other artistic media regularly employ bodily images.

This thoroughgoing reinterpretation of the biblical texts dates at least as early as Philo, who, in his tract *Hoti atrepton theion* ("That the Divine is unchanging"), proposed that God's perfection implied immutability and, by extension, the absence of a body and accompanying negative emotions.² His claims, though modified in various ways, have become central to Jewish and Christian reflections on the nature of God, as can be seen in such texts as Maimonides's *Moreh*

¹ For a view of metaphor more broadly conceived, deriving from the work of Lakoff and others, see the studies in P. van Hecke, *Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible* (BETL 187; Leuven: University Press/Peeters, 2005). As René Heyer has pointed out in his study of parables in the New Testament and elsewhere, figurative language exists in a complex relationship with traditions, sometimes undercutting them or expressing a culture's dissatisfaction with its own received ideas, sometimes marking out ideational space that can constitute "une solution politique de hiérarchisation fondée sur l'antériorité et la localisation du sacré" (195), and always both opening and closing possibilities of interpretation ("Un vraie parabole": Crise de la tradition et transmission," in idem, ed., *Le Voyage des Paraboles: Bible, Littérature et Herméneutique* (Strasbourg: Presses Universitaires de Strasbourg, 2011), 187-96, esp. 195. This more robust notion of metaphor would apply to the biblical uses of divine bodily imagery, while the more popular-level notion that prevails in many treatments of the subject would not.

² For the text of the tract, I follow the edition in Philo, *Quod deus immutabilis sit* (LCL; trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1930). The translation, however, is my own. On Philo's many discussions of (1) how human minds, but not bodies, are in God's image and thus (2) how limits exist for the use of anthropomorphic language for God, see Thomas Tobin, *The Creation of Man: Philo and the Interpretation of History* (CBQMS 14; Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association, 1983), esp. 36.

Nevukhim or *Guide of the Perplexed*³ and Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*,⁴ to take only the most brilliant and influential examples. While the appropriateness of attributing to God states resembling human emotions, positive or negative, remains a topic of discussion, an enduring consensus in these traditions has been that God lacks a body, in spite of numerous statements in the Hebrew Bible to the contrary.

Here I examine key elements of Philo's arguments in *Hoti atrepton to theion* and seek to identify their antecedents (or lack thereof) from the biblical traditions that Philo inherited. I then seek to show how Philo's exegesis, while it clearly reconfigures the original texts' construal of God and humanity as subjects with distinct attributes, does so in ways that rest upon his biblical exegesis and are in some ways prepared for by the biblical texts themselves. In other words, the theological views that Philo articulated for perhaps the first (but certainly not the last) time in full-blown form simply reconfigure the raw materials of a tradition that came to him from ancient Israel.

Here I contend however that, while the Hebrew Bible does not make the case for a bodiless or emotionless deity, it does offer raw materials for such a view, and thus the later reinterpretation of those texts does not mark a caesura but a hermeneutically sophisticated (though not inevitable) surfacing of possibilities

³ Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.35-48, 55-56. See the handy English translation of Shlomo Pines, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (with an introductory essay by Leo Strauss; 2 vols.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963).

⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, Question 2, Article 2. For an English translation, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Questions on God* (ed. Brian Davies and Brian Leftow; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Aquinas proposes three reasons for God's lack of a body: (1) no body causes change without itself being change, but God is unchanging; (2) bodies have potentiality, but God has no potentiality, only actuality; and (3) bodies cannot be the most noble thing conceivable because they die and decay, while God, by definition is most noble. That is, Aquinas proposes both rational and axiological reasons for a disembodied, hence radically simple, God.

latent in the texts themselves. Philo's agenda of constructing a philosophically-oriented commentary on Pentateuchal narratives means that most of his prooftexts come from that corpus,⁵ but other texts also play a role, and some of them seem more germane to his discussion than the lemmata provoking his commentary. As I will argue, his discussion of the relationship among divine embodiment, agency, and emotion has ample precedent in the Hebrew Bible itself.⁶

Philo and the Reconfiguration of the Divine Body

We should begin, then, by noting how Philo the biblical expositor lays out his case.⁷ Wolfson summarizes Philo's understanding of divine disembodiment, stated at a number of points in his corpus, with the sweeping dictum, "'Incorporeality' is merely the expression in philosophic terminology of what is implied in the scriptural doctrine of the unlikeness of God to other beings."⁸ This far-reaching generalization contains important elements of the truth, to be sure, but precisely

⁵ For general discussions of Philo's use of philosophical terms in his exegesis, and the implications of his usage, both in his own work and for later readers of his, see Folker Siegert, "The Philonian Fragment De Deo: First English Translation," *Studia Philonica Annual* 10 (1998): 29-30; Gregory E. Sterling, "Recherché or Representative? What is the Relationship between Philo's Treatises and Greek-speaking Judaism," *Studia Philonica Annual* 11 (1999): 1-30; Ilaria L. E. Ramelli, "Philosophical Allegoresis of Scripture in Philo and Its Legacy in Gregory of Nyssa," *Studia Philonica Annual* 20 (2008): 55-99;

⁶ The tract does cite the Psalter, however: Ps 100(101):1 in 74-75; Ps 74(75):8 in 77; Ps 61(62):11 in 82; and Ps 90(91):11-12 in 182. Of particular interest is the reference to Ps 61(62), *hapax kyrios elalēse duo tauta ēkousa* ("once has the Lord spoken, two things have I heard") which serves as evidence for Philo of the unity of divine speech but the duality of human hearing, and thus of God's need to accommodate speech to the capacity (and for the benefit) of human beings.

⁷ I leave to one side the complex question of Philo's relationship to so-called Middle Platonism and the philosophical tradition of which it is part. A convincing understanding of this problem is that of David Runia, who argues that Philo was a constructive thinker whose work operated with two poles: the Jewish tradition and Greek philosophy, with neither always predominating, and with him adopting at times explicitly non- or even anti-Platonic viewpoints. See David T. Runia, "Was Philo a Middle Platonist: A Difficult Question Revisited," *SPhilo* 5 (1993): 112-40, esp. 124-39; slightly differently, Gregory E. Sterling, "Platonizing Moses: Philo and Middle Platonism," *SPhilo* 5 (1993): 96-111.

⁸ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947), 2:96.

how does Philo make the shift from biblical to philosophical language (all the while imagining himself not to be shifting at all)?

In the *Hoti atrepton to theion*, a tract on Gen 6:4-12 and thus a direct continuation of the tract *Peri gigantōn*, Philo's argument proceeds in several steps, all grounded in a theologically oriented literary criticism. While the argument takes on a meandering form because of its essentially exegetical character, it is possible to identify a coherent pattern to his thought. The steps of the argument, beginning with an exploration of the relationship of the virtues to the human beings living them out, include

1. Assigning to the ἄγγελοι a divided soul that allows them to mate with the passions (παρευημερήσαντες πάθει τοῖς κατεαγόσι καὶ τεθληλυμένοις) a.k.a. the "daughters of men" (1.1-3);
2. Contrasting with these vicious creatures the virtuous exemplars Abraham and Hannah, who embody the divinely parented virtues (1.4-2.9);
3. Expanding the contrast between the vicious and the virtuous through an argument *e minore ad maiorem* (if bodily cleanliness is required to enter a stone sanctuary how much more spiritual spotlessness to approach the God that the sanctuary honors) according to which the self-purifying pursuit of thankfulness and piety (εὐχαριστητικῶς ... καὶ τιμητικῶς) is the precondition of God's acceptance (2.7-8);
4. Further developing the contrast between the vicious and the virtuous person by an exegesis of 1 Sam 2:5's reference to the "one" and the "seven," with Hannah becoming the undistracted soul and Peninnah (albeit unnamed)

standing in for the person whose radically fractured soul can know only through the senses, and therefore can apprehend only those items knowable through the senses (*σχήματα ... χρώματα*) (3.10-15)

5. A digression on those who, like Onan, beget only for themselves, i.e., short-circuit the pursuit of virtue (4.16-19)

So far, then, Philo has commented on Gen 6:4's famously obfuscatory explanatory note, *εἰσεπορεύοντο οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ πρὸς τὰς θυγατέρας τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἐγεννῶσαν ἑαυτοῖς* ("the sons of God went into the daughters of humanity and begot for them"). He follows the wider tradition in understanding the divine-human coupling as a negative event, and attributes it to the misapprehension of the ἀγγελοὶ of virtue. The more radical shift in his reading of Genesis occurs when he understands the lemma as speaking less of divine agents than of human agency (or indeed agency of any rational being, of which he knows two species). The correspondence between the virtue and the virtuous (or conversely, the vice and the vicious) plays throughout this exegetical trip.

Philo's argument plays upon binary oppositions present within the biblical texts he cites. Thus the virtuous Hannah and her non-virtuous unnamed co-wife provide a springboard for a disquisition on problematic sexuality as a metaphor for estrangement from the higher virtues (repeated pregnancy with the vices in Peninnah's case; a sort of spiritual coitus interruptus in Onan's). However, these elementary pairings primarily illustrate the nature of knowing and practicing the virtues as a case of matching the character of the person to the structure of good and evil itself, a sort of virtue ethics without the name.

At the opening of the tract, then, the argument involves rational beings such as humans and angels. However, Philo's exegesis turns to the most problematic verses in this pericope, Gen 6:5-7, which suggests that

The Lord God, saw that the evils of human beings multiplied on the earth, and that all that it thought about in its heart was constantly evil all day, and God reconsidered (ἐνεθυμήθη) having made the human being on the earth, and thought about it (διενοήθη). So God said, "I will eliminate the human being that I made from the face of the earth – human being to beasts, from reptiles to birds of the sky – because I regret having made them."

This remarkable text, which shows signs of redactional reworking in the LXX's Hebrew Vorlage (which differs only slightly from MT),⁹ appears in the literal translation of the LXX as more integrated than in the Hebrew original. However, for Philo, a straightforward acceptance of the text's surface meaning with respect to divine agency and motives is impossible, and indeed impious. Rather, he goes to considerable lengths to offer a reading that is at once countertextual and yet deeply engaged with the words of the text itself.

The problem with the surface of the biblical text lies in its apparent attribution of changeableness of mind to God, since mutability implies defect or deficit of knowledge, will, or commitment to the good, if not all three. Philo, interestingly, does not allow for the positive aspects of a change of mind in human beings (greater insight, for example), emphasizing instead the negative aspects

In fashioning his case, then, Philo first argues *e minore ad maiorem* that since the σοφός ("sage") exercises restraint and a careful balancing of moral opposites

⁹ Note, however, the value of OG as a witness to a non-MT Hebrew Vorlage, as argued for by Ronald S. Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1-11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), esp. 15-20.

(ἐπιστήμη τῶν ἐναντίων),¹⁰ how much more so does God, who epitomizes completeness (τελειότης) and virtue (εὐδαιμονία).¹¹ Just as the wise human being is a musical instrument on which the virtues are played perfectly (as a sort of Aeolian harp, apparently), God also to a much greater extent acts in accordance with virtue, never participating in the deficits that are the vices. Divine unchangeableness thus has a moral dimension: its opposite makes room for fickleness or arbitrariness.

However, Philo does not locate divine immutability strictly in the moral sphere, but adds further restrictions:

- God knows the intelligible universe through eternity, not changeable time, and is therefore not prone to learn more¹²;
- God differs from created beings, whose varying attributes befit their station, whether the capacity for growth in plants (φύσις), an awareness of surroundings in animals (ψυχή), or the reasoning capacity (λογικὴ ψυχὴ) in humans (and presumably angels)¹³;
- God does not experience negative emotions, and thus biblical language to the contrary is a concession to human ignorance (τοῦ νοθετῆσαι χάριν τοὺς ἐτέρως μὴ δυναμένους σωφρονίζεσθαι)¹⁴;
- and decisively, God lacks body parts because they serve functions inappropriate for deity.¹⁵

¹⁰ Philo, *Deus*, 6.24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.24-26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 6.32; cf. Augustine, *Conf.*, 13

¹³ *Ibid.*, 7.33-10.50. For a more thorough discussion of Philo's conception of knowledge and wisdom as a subset of knowing, see Jang Ryu, *Knowledge of God in Philo of Alexandria* (WUNT 2/405; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2015), 41-44.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.52.

The final point follows from the arguments supported by his exegesis of Genesis. In continuity with the Bible itself, Philo affirms the distinction between the creator and the created, denying any *analogia entis* while celebrating divine mercy to human beings and all the created order (*ἐκβιβάσαντες αὐτὸ πάσης ποιότητος*).¹⁶ This claim leads directly to a *reductio ad absurdum* argument according to which locomotive body parts are unnecessary for a God who “fills everything” (*πεπληρωκῶς τὰ πάντα*), agential parts are unnecessary for a God who works through intermediaries inspired to act through the Logos, and perceptual parts (sense organs) are unnecessary for a God who created the conditions for perception.¹⁷

Philo thus takes great pains to square his understanding of the deity with the language of Scripture, which he consistently translates (reduces?) into speech aimed at benefiting the reader (*ὠφελῆσαι τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας*).¹⁸ He understands God to exercise mercy while using accommodative language in order to educate humankind, and thus sees God as one whose lack of a body and of erratic emotions is a corollary of the perfection humans should, but ultimately cannot fully, imitate.

The question is, then, to what extent did Philo share such views with other Jewish texts and with the Bible itself? Certainly, some of his core ideas also appear in roughly contemporary Jewish texts. For example, his notion that the deity is ultimately inscrutable because the embodiment of human beings (and presumably other sentient beings) fits them for their own life of learning through reason or

¹⁵ Ibid., 12.56-13.62. Philo’s argument is essentially a *reductio ad absurdum*. His God has no relationships or needs that would necessitate having a body analogous to that of creatures.

¹⁶ Ibid., 11.56.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12;47-59.

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.61.

sense impression but not the eternal knowledge characteristic of God appears in hymnic texts. Consider Wisd 9:13-18, part of a hymn to God that includes a textual trigger from Isa 40-41:

τίς γὰρ ἄνθρωπος γνώσεται βουλήν θεοῦ;
ἢ τίς ἐνθυμηθήσεται τί θέλει ὁ κύριος;
λογισμοὶ γὰρ θνητῶν δειλοί,
καὶ ἐπισφαλεῖς αἱ ἐπίνοιαί ἡμῶν·
φθαρτὸν γὰρ σῶμα βαρύνει ψυχὴν,
καὶ βρῖθει τὸ γεῶδες σκῆνος νοῦν πολυφρόντιδα.

What person knows God's counsel?
Or who will discern what the LORD wishes?
For the reasonings of mortals are folly,
Our thoughts risk-filled.
The incorruptible body weighs down the soul,
And this earthly tent burdens the multi-thinking mind.

The psalm, which introduces the extended sapientially-oriented meditation on biblical history laid out in Wisd 10-12, thus adds to its biblical kernel an idea that is not strictly speaking in the older tradition in the same form, for the Isaiah tradition did not understand the impairment of human reason as ontologically dependent on embodiment, while Wisdom does. On the other hand, the hymn in Wisd 9:16-18 remains closer to its biblical origins than does Philo in that it assumes the deity's surpassing wisdom (as in Isaiah 40-55) without exploring the nature of God's knowing.

The notion of the limits of the human mind present in Philo and Wisdom of Solomon does appear, moreover, in Bar 3:26-28's meditation on the giants of Gen 6, which is also the theme of the Philonic tract immediately preceding *Hoti atrepton to theion*:

ἐκεῖ ἐγεννήθησαν οἱ γίγαντες οἱ ὀνομαστοὶ οἱ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς, γενόμενοι εὐμεγέσθεις, ἐπιστάμενοι πόλεμον. Οὐ τούτους ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεὸς οὐδὲ ὁδὸν ἐπιστήμης ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς. Καὶ ἀπώλοντο παρὰ τὸ μὴ ἔχειν φρόνησιν, ἀπώλοντο διὰ τὴν ἀβουλίαν αὐτῶν.

There the giants were born, the famous ones of yore, soaring, skilled at war. God did not choose these nor give them the road to understanding. So they were destroyed for lacking discernment, destroyed for their stupidity.

Nothing in Genesis, of course, points to the epistemic impairment either of the giants or their angelic progenitors. Their alleged ignorance of virtue is a conclusion drawn more from their fate and character as rebels than from anything explicit in Genesis, though the interpretive tradition has emphasized their folly as well as their lack of discernment.¹⁹

A number of the ideas in play in *Hoti atrepton to theion* have parallels in other Jewish texts of the late Second Temple period, at least in some form: the notion of divine ubiquity and sharp distinction from other persons (see below), the non-sexual nature of the deity, the correlation between the virtues and the humans exemplifying them. But the crucial point of the disembodiment of the deity is more difficult to show and deserves more careful consideration. To trace out the history of this idea, it will be important to step back from Philo and consider, first, the understanding of divine embodiment in biblical texts.

A Biblical View.

¹⁹ Cf. Sir 14:6; Wisd 16:7; 3 Macc 2:4; in the latter two texts, the giants are paired with the inhabitants of Sodom. In the Qumranic “Book of Giants,” their inability to interpret dreams, a key feature of some traditions’ understanding of wisdom, leads them to seek the guidance of Enoch. See 4Q530 frag. 2; 4Q531 frag. 17. For extended discussion of 4Q530-33, the definitive edition is that of Émile Puech, ed., *Qumrân Grotte 4*, vol. 22: *Textes araméens première partie 4Q 529-549* (DJD 31; Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), 9-127.

This understanding of the issue has, again, profoundly shaped Christian theology in part because of Philo's influence on Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and through them the later Greek Patristic tradition,²⁰ and therefore interpretations of the Bible (although one should not claim that Philo's influence alone accounts for the success of the idea of divine bodilessness). Yet the problem that Philo himself took pains to address, namely, that the biblical language about God's body and God's emotions is widespread and not easily dismissed as a pedagogical device, remains. The question then becomes whether the biblical text itself provides the raw material for Philo's shift, or whether his move is simply a misreading, perhaps motivated by his apologetic needs for a Hellenized audience, but in any case responding to notions of divine agency and emotion (and therefore, divine selfhood) that differ from those in the texts that Philo inherited and venerated.

The difficulty, of course, is that the Bible is replete with bodily images for God. As two major studies have recently pointed out, the Bible's depictions of divine embodiment are complex and persistent. Thus Andreas Wagner bases his work on a cataloguing of the body parts named in the Hebrew Bible and their uses attributed to Israel's God, and arguing that "Wie im alttestamentlichen Konzept bleibt dann Gott einerseits nahbar, kommunizierbar, wirkmächtig, andererseits ist er

²⁰ For basic studies of this influence, see Annewies van den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis* (VCSup; Leiden: Brill, 1988); eadem, "The 'Catechetical' School of Early Christian Alexandria and Its Philonic Heritage," *HTR* 90 (1997): 59-87; eadem, "Assessing Philo's Influence on Christian Alexandria: The Case of Origen," in *Shem in the Tents of Jacob: Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism* (ed. James Kugel; JSJSup 74; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 223-39; Gregory E. Sterling, "Recherché or Representative? What is the Relationship between Philo's Treatises and Greek-speaking Judaism," *SPhilo* 11 (1999): 1-30; David T. Runia, "One of Us or One of Them? Christian Reception of Philo the Jew in Egypt," in *Shem in the Tents of Jacob: Essays on the Encounter of Judaism and Hellenism* (ed. James Kugel; JSJSup 74; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 203-22; and Thomas H. Olbricht, "Greek Rhetoric and the Allegorical Rhetoric of Philo and Clement of Alexandria," in *Rhetorical Criticism and the Bible* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSup 195; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 24-47.

unverfügbar und wahrt seine Gottheit, auch in Menschengestalt.”²¹ Wagner notes the complexity of ideas such as anthropomorphism and takes an approach to the subject that assumes that, as with Egyptian art, Israel understood the human or divine body as an assemblage of discrete parts understandable on their own terms.²² Wagner pursues this notion throughout his book, which carefully catalogues the biblical references to various body parts, as well as glyptic material, graffiti (especially from Kuntillet Ajrud), and other visual media. All of these data point to an Egyptian influence during the period of the Israelite monarchies, which one should also expect on other grounds.²³

²¹ Andreas Wagner, *Gottes Körper: Zur alttestamentlichen Vorstellung der Menschengestaltigkeit Gottes* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2010), 188. See also my review of this book in *RBL* (2012): 81-83.

²² For a discussion of this viewpoint in Egyptian texts, see the recent study of Friedhelm Hoffmann, “Zum Körperkonzept in Ägypten (P. Berlin P. 10472 A + 14400),” in *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im Alten Israel, in Ägypten und im Alten Orient* (ed. Angelika Berlejung, Jan Dietrich, and Joachim Friedrich Quack; ORA 9; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2012), 481-500; on Egyptian views of the dead human body revived in the afterlife, especially as a container and as part of a network of signs employing categories such as nearness and farness, control, verticality, and linkages, see the study of Rune Nyord, *Breathing Flesh: Conceptions of the Body in the Ancient Egyptian Coffin Texts* (CNI Publications 37; Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen/Museum Tusulanum Press, 2009).

²³ The classic study of Egyptian relationships with the successive states in the southern Levant remains Donald Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). Egyptian influence over southern Levantine (i.e., Palestinian) developments went back as far as the Chalcolithic (Naqada) period and continued to ebb and flow until a peak in the Ramesside period. See the discussion in, e.g., Edwin C. M. van den Brink and Thomas E. Levy, eds., *Egypt and the Levant: Interrelations from the 4th through the Early 3rd Millennium BCE* (London/New York: Leicester University Press, 2002); Luc Watrin, *Les échanges entre la Palestine et l’Égypte au IV^{ème} millénaire: Etat de la question* (2 vols.; Paris: Université de Paris I, 1995); Wolfgang Helck, *Die Beziehungen Ägyptens zu Vorderasien im 3. und 2. Jahrtausend v. Chr.* (2nd ed.; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1971); for the massive influence on architecture, ceramics, and other artifacts, especially in the Bronze Age(s) see Ann E. Killebrew, “New Kingdom Egyptian-Style and Egyptian Pottery in Canaan: Implications for Egyptian Rule in Canaan during the 19th and 20th Dynasties,” in *Egypt, Israel, and the Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford* (ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch; Leiden: Brill, 2004), 309-43; Susan L. Cohen, *Canaanites, Chronologies, and Connections: The Relationship of Middle Bronze IIA Canaan to Middle Kingdom Egypt* (SAHL 3; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002); Carolyn R. Higginbotham, *Egyptianization and Elite Emulation in Ramesside Palestine: Governance and Accommodation on the Imperial Periphery* (CHANE 2; Leiden: Brill, 2000). For the Iron II period, note the studies of Bernd U. Schipper, “Egyptian Imperialism after the New Kingdom: The 26th Dynasty and the Southern Levant,” in *Egypt, Canaan and Israel: History, Imperialism, Ideology and Literature* (ed. S. Bar, D. Kahn, and J. J. Shirley; CHANE 52; Leiden: Brill, 2011), 268-90.

Without trying to trace all the intricacies of Wagner's argument, one may note several important points. (1) Israel's depiction of divine bodies is somehow associated with its understanding of human bodies. (2) The binary opposition "body as communication device"/"body as instrument of divine agency" has great explanatory power, encompassing many texts. (3) However, the differences between divine and human bodies, not only in scale or capabilities, but in social meaning, render the very dichotomy Wagner finds in the text an insufficiently probative description of the biblical writers' conceptions. For example, if bodies communicate, what and to whom do they communicate? Does not our need to consider the social body of the deity (i.e., the body as displayed or obscured, as talked about and interacted with) render the discussion of the body on its own terms inadequate or even misguided? A more useful approach must consider these elements.

The more detailed and methodologically sensitive (and indeed, trailblazing) work of Benjamin Sommer does so. He argues that, while many texts in the Hebrew Bible accept the standard ancient Near Eastern view that deities could inhabit multiple bodies without any one of them exhausting the fullness of that deity, the Deuteronomic and Priestly traditions, in different ways, rejected the notion of divine "fluidity" in favor of a more centered selfhood. One may quibble with Sommer's elision of embodiment and selfhood, in my view,²⁴ but his overall thesis is persuasive.²⁵

²⁴ Note the discussion of the development of modern conceptions of the autonomous self disengaged from its social background and moral framework in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989). As Taylor puts it, "Much contemporary

Sommer teases out the fluid and nonfluid traditions in the Hebrew Bible and its later interpreters, noting however several boundary cases.²⁶ The fluid traditions survive in kabbalah and elsewhere, and they offer contemporary Jews greater theological insights, he argues, in part because they offer fuller possibilities for divine engagement in the world and human contact with the deity.²⁷ By contrast, the non-fluid traditions in D and P posit a more distant God who can be approached only in mediated ways, especially through ethical lives obedient to Torah. Sommer's argument, whatever its historical accuracy (which in fact is impressive), takes a systematic theological turn that puts it in opposition to the Philonic linkage between a non-fluid, and indeed non-embodied God, and the ethical qualities of the deity. Philo's God cannot have multiple bodies (Sommer's fluidity) because his understanding of ethics depends on impassability (freedom from emotions that distract the mind from the pursuit of virtue) and thus a break from the

moral philosophy, particularly but not only in the English-speaking world, has given such a narrow focus to morality that . . . has tended to focus on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be, on defining the content of obligation rather than the nature of the good life; and it has no conceptual place left for a notion of the good as the object of our love or allegiance or . . . the privileged focus of attention or will" (3). Sommer seems to assume a certain relationship between selfhood and embodiment, without spelling out what that relationship is. A conception of selfhood in society seems vital to understanding Israel's notions of embodiment, both for human beings and appositely, for the deity. At least one aspect of selfhood revolves around the question of interiority, which may apply to depictions of Yhwh as well. See the discussion below.

²⁵ Benjamin Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For Egypt, see Ann Macy Roth, "The Representation of the Divine in Ancient Egypt," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; BJS 346; Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 2006), 24-37; differently, Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt* (trans. David Lorton; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001), 40-52. On Mesopotamia, see Victor Avigdor Hurowitz, "What Goes In is What Comes Out – Materials for Creating Cult Statues," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; BJS 346; Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 2006), 3-23.

²⁶ Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 127-28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 137-40.

anthropomorphism (or any other analogous language)²⁸ that is an almost inevitable corollary of the traditions of fluid divine embodiment.

Again, the Hebrew Bible itself speaks of Yhwh's eyes, hands, strong arm, ears, and so on. It is possible to follow the course that Philo laid out, by which we understand such language as metaphorical, but Wagner and Sommer are surely correct in arguing that such a view does not accurately represent the original assumptions and intentions of the biblical traditions. Even if we could agree on what "metaphorical" language for a deity is or whether strictly non-metaphorical language exists for deity or any other sentient being, it is clear that the Israelite authors believed that Yhwh (not to mention other deities) really did have a body with at least some parts analogous to those of human beings and perhaps other creatures (such as God's wings).²⁹

²⁸ The primary alternative to anthropomorphism is theriomorphism, which does appear in the Hebrew Bible, as when Yhwh is a lion (e.g., Joel 4:16; Amos 4:2); see the study of Brent A. Strawn, *What is Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East* (OBO 212; Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005). As Hoffmann ("Körperkonzept in Ägypten," esp. 495) explains the well-known fact, however, the merger of human and nonhuman bodies in depictions of deity was part of the mode of operation in Egyptian art, indicating the elastic nature of the divine body. Another possible avenue available to ancient thinkers was the emphasis on the numinous nature of the "inanimate" objects or natural forces, with such things as rivers, rocks, and seas providing imagery for deity as well. On the numinousness of such realities, see Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer, *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (trans. Peter T. Daniels; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), esp. 22-69.

²⁹ Deut 32:11; Pss 17:8; 36:8; 57:2; 61:5; 63:8; 91:4. In the Psalter, the "praying I" speaks of its own bodily fragility, which may find solace in the "shadow" (צל) or, in 61:5, the "hiddenness" (סתר) of Elohim (or in Ps 17, of Yhwh, and Ps 91 of Elyon). The avian imagery, or rather mixed human and avian imagery, appears in several forms, e.g., as a symbol of the supreme deity in Egyptian and later Assyrian art, and in the *jinn*s gracing Assyrian art in palaces from that of Assurnasirpal II at Nimrud onward. These images betoken divine protection, triggering emotions of comfort and support in their audience. On the symbol system of the reliefs of the Northwest Palace of Assurnasirpal II, especially Rooms F and B (which formed a suite and an artistic unity) see the study of Janusz Meuszynski, *Die Rekonstruktion der Reliefdarstellungen und ihrer Anordnung im Nordwestpalast von Kalhu (Nimrud)* (Baghdader Forschung 2; Mainz: von Zabern, 1981). Moreover, Ann Shafer has shown that the monumental schemata in the Neo-Assyrian palaces, which varied among themselves, to be sure, nevertheless influenced the art of steles around the empire, a fact, I would argue, that might explain the popularity of the motif of winged superhuman beings even in Israel; see Ann Shafer, "Assyrian Royal Monuments on the Periphery: Ritual and the Making of Imperial Space," in *Ancient Near Eastern Art in Context: Studies in Honor of Irene J.*

Nor can the shift from embodiment to disembodiment be explained straightforwardly in terms of (1) Hellenism (whatever that is), since Hellenistic gods often had bodies, Hellenistic views of matter, body, soul, and other basic terms were contested and heterogeneous then and ever since,³⁰ and some non-Greek cults entered the Greek-speaking world while keeping most of their original identity;³¹ (2) Israel's shift to aniconism, which does not logically demand the nonexistence of a divine body, but merely its non-representation, since iconic but metonymic representations of deity³² have precedents in the ancient Near East as various religions there struggled with the question of divine embodiment and agency, and

Winter by Her Students (ed. Jack Cheng and Marian H. Feldman; CHANE 26; Leiden: Brill, 2007), 133-59, esp. 138-39.

³⁰ See the brilliant discussion in Dale Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), esp. 6-37; Laura Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Verity Platt, *Facing the Gods: Epiphany and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). I thank my colleagues Christopher Hutson and Trevor Thompson for help on these points. Moreover, Hellenization took many forms in the Near East. For Babylonia, for example, the older culture survived largely intact. See the discussion in Joachim Oelsner, "30 Thesen zum Thema 'Aramaisierung – Hellenisierung – Iranisierung Babylonien'," in *Getrennte Wege? Kommunikation, Raum und Wahrnehmung in der Alten Welt* (ed. Robert Rollinger, Andreas Luther, and Josef Wiesehöfer; Oikumene 2; Frankfurt: Verlag Antike, 2007), 218-27.

³¹ In his survey of the issues, David Potter sees three instances of this phenomenon, the cults of Kybele, Atartagis, and Yhwh, all of which involved a central site and longstanding manners of life that survived amid cultures Hellenized in other ways. See his comments in David Potter, "Hellenistic Religion," in *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (ed. Andrew Erskine; Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2005), 424; and the more extensive study of Louis Robert, "Documents d'Asie Mineure," *BCH* 107 (1983): 497-599, who offers many examples of the assimilation of the non-Greek gods to Greek models, the alternative option in the Hellenistic world. The point is that Philo's active rethinking of the received Jewish tradition in light of his environment was one way of doing things in his world, but his opting for that path was not an arbitrary, individual choice, but part of a broader process conditioned by his Judaism.

³² E.g., on Mesopotamian stelae in which the gods are represented by some object that indexes them, such as Ishtar's moon or the hat of the mountain god when the Neo-Assyrian stele was erected in the periphery of the empire (such as Esarhaddon's at Zinçirli). The symbols index the deities rather than represent them iconically, and their less than clear referentiality allows the viewer to think of the divine realm without knowing the precise intentions of the stele's creators or royal sponsor. See further Tallay Ornan, *The Triumph of the Symbol: Pictorial Representation of Deities in Mesopotamia and the Biblical Image Ban* (OBO 213; Fribourg/Göttingen: Academic Press/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), esp. 133-67 (who sees a competition between the divine and human figures in the artistic composition of many such monuments); but see also Barbara Nevling Porter, "Assyrian Propaganda for the West: Esarhaddon's Stelae for Til Barsip and Sam'al," *Ancient Near Eastern Studies Supplement* 7 (2000): 143-76.

since Israelite religion was never strictly aniconic (it merely textualized iconism)³³; or (3) monotheism, since the elimination of multiplicity can lead to a view of a single cosmic divine body as in Stoicism and even in some Mesopotamian texts.³⁴ All of these conditions may bear on the shift, but none of them can explain it in a monocausal way. The transition from ancient Israel's incomparable deity to the incorporeal being of later Judaism and Christianity must have drawn from something in the Israelite tradition itself for it to have been persuasive.

Psalms, Job, and Yhwh's Unusual Body.

What in that tradition might have paved the way for such a turn, then? In considering biblical texts that speak of the body of Israel's deity, one notices immediately the prevalence of references to body parts such as eyes, hands or arms, or a face. These parts usually appear in association with descriptions of divine activity, either saving or destroying, and thus in ways that cast the biblical author and implied audience as either spectator or recipient of divine activity (and thus, at

³³ A point made by Karel van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies Between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (ed. Karel van der Toorn; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 229-48. The Temple and even all of Jerusalem could also function as a sign of Yhwh's presence and therefore being (e.g., Pss 48; 51; 69; 74; 76; 78; 84; 87; 97; 99; 102; 125; 126; 129; 133; 137; 146; 147; 149), a not very different idea. See also Henning Graf Reventlow, "Der Tempel als Ort der Kommunikation im alten Israel," in *Die Eigenart des Jahweglaubens: Beiträge zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (Biblich-Theologische Studien 66; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2004), 115-34.

³⁴ Amid the vast literature on this subject, some recent works of value include the essays in Reinhard Kratz and Hermann Spieckermann, eds., *One God – One Cult – One Nation: Archaeological and Biblical Perspectives* (BZAW 405; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010); Lukas Bormann, ed., *Schöpfung, Monotheismus und fremde Religion* (Biblich-Theologische Studien 95; Neukirchen-Vluyn, 2008); James P. Allen, "Monotheism in Ancient Egypt," in *Text, Artifact, and Image: Revealing Ancient Israelite Religion* (ed. Gary Beckman and Theodore J. Lewis; BJS 346; Providence, R.I.: Brown University, 2006), 319-25; Bernhard Lang, "Der Ruf zum Umkehr: Israels Religionsgeschichte aus ethnologischer Sicht," in *Primäre und sekundäre Religion als Kategorie der Religionsgeschichte des Alten Testaments* (BZAW 364; ed. Andreas Wagner; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 121-37; the essays in Barbara Nevling Porter, *One God or Many: Concepts of Divinity in the Ancient World* (Casco Bay, Me.: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000).

some level, as judge of the legitimacy or otherwise of the manifestation of the divine body part in time and space). Moreover, the divine body is often surrounded by some manifestation of the numinous, often indexed by such vocabulary as הוד, הדר, or כבוד. Here I wish to consider a few texts that indicate Israelite reflection on the nature of Yhwh's body, framed by the question of the social uses of the body in its relationship to human beings. I do not assume that these texts are unique in understanding the nature of Yhwh's body as something beyond human comprehension and therefore signification even in relationship to other sorts of bodies. Quite the opposite, for these texts are only part of the relevant corpus, but perhaps they suffice to make the point.

Divine Embodiment in Psalms and Job: An Overview. Since the Hebrew Bible contains no discursive treatise upon Yhwh's body or selfhood, the most logical place to look for evidence of discussion of such a topic are texts that had liturgical functions or echoed them in some way, without speculating on the precise nature of those functions. Hence the choice at this point of texts in the Psalter and in Job, a book that interrogates the liturgical language at many points.

Here one may take a cue from a point that Stephen Geller has recently made. Geller has noted the inconcinnities that arise from a purely form-critical approach to the Psalter (a problem that Gunkel himself already understood), and has proposed to read the individual psalms and the collection as a whole for the ways in which the metaphors in the text trigger emotional and ideational associations in readers, with

		<p>deliverance for those crushed by fall of Jerusalem</p> <p>Ps 89:22 selection of David</p> <p>Job 40:9 divine body incommensurate with that of humans</p>
ד	<p>Ps 75:9 Yhwh holds cup that the wicked drink</p> <p>Job 10:8 Eloah oppresses Job</p> <p>Job 12:9 oppresses Job</p> <p>Job 19:21 oppresses Job</p>	<p>Ps 8:7 Yhwh appoints humankind over other work of his hands (מעשי ידיך)</p> <p>Ps 55: 21; 81:15; 138:7; 144:7; Job 5:18 the deity rescues Israel or the weak</p> <p>Ps 89:22 parallels use of זרוע above</p> <p>Ps 19:2; 28:5; 92:5; 95:5; 102:26; 119:73; Job 14:15 all things are the deity's creation</p> <p>Job 27:11 Yhwh's deeds impinge upon the fate of the wicked</p> <p>Job 34:19 El Shaddai brings about justice for all his creation</p>

Several conclusions emerge from a survey of the evidence. (1) Language of agency, involving hands and arms (though not always interchangeably) often triggers associations with the divine warrior myth, but sometimes the specific action that the petitioner in the prayers seeks is so unclear as to be susceptible to many interpretations.³⁶ In other words, the divine warrior associations can serve ends far removed from their original significations. (2) In some cases, too, the precise

³⁶ In a recent study, full of highly thought-provoking and even brilliant insights, Shawn W. Flynn has argued for a fairly sharp distinction between divine warrior imagery and creation imagery in the Psalter. A broader survey of the material might call such a dichotomy into question, however. See Shawn W. Flynn, *YHWH is King: The Development of Divine Kingship in Ancient Israel* (VTSupp 159; Leiden: Brill, 2014).

register of violence assumed is unclear, as with the use of Yhwh's "arm" to select David (Ps 89:22). The king, after all, was a warrior, but his kingship was not reducible to that single function. (3) Moreover, the rhetorical question in Job 40:9 – וְאַם זְרוּעַ כְּאַל וּבְקוֹל כְּמַהוּ תִרְעַם ("have you an arm like El's; can you roar with a voice like his?") – signals both the similarities and dissimilarities between the human and the divine body, not just in quantity of power, but in proper display and therefore social meaning (cf. Ps 44:4).

(4) This dissimilarity appears also in the יָד imagery. In the Psalter, the wicked (or dogs, or even Sheol) may grasp the righteous with their hands,³⁷ a theme also picked up by Job's friends, but inverted during the tetralogue of chapters 3-25 by Job himself, who challenges the assumption that the deity protects the righteous. However, both Job in his most querulous state and the liturgical world that he evokes assume a close correlation among the functioning of agential body parts (and thus of personal agency in general), the character of the actor, and the status of the audience (the "praying I" of the Psalter and implicitly Job).³⁸ The bodily imagery has, in other words, a moral dimension that triggers in the implied audience of the poetry a series of judgments on the quality of the person whose body is in question. To link Yhwh's agency to his personhood by bodily means, as Job does, challenges the entire received theology of the divine body as carrier of justice (e.g., Pss 44; 71).

³⁷ Pss 18:1 (superscription); 22:21; 26:10; 31:9, 16; 36:12; 58:3; 63:11; 71:4; 78:61; 82:4; 89:49; 97:10; 106:10, 41; 107:2; 123:2 (?); 136:12; 144:7, 11; cf. Job 8:24; 9:24; 20:22; 31:21, 25, 27.

³⁸ Something like this linkage also appears in some texts expressing a sense of the praying person's feelings of loss because of the absence of the deity. On this point, see Dörte Bester, *Körperbilder in den Psalmen: Studien zu Psalm 22 und verwandten Texten* (FAT 2/24; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2007). Bester explores both the psychological (interior) and social dimensions of Ps 22's understanding of embodiment.

Yet it shares with the older tradition the idea that the divine body is not simply a human body writ large or less vulnerable, but is qualitatively different. After all, the deity can create the cosmos through bodily activity, whether as a craftsman (hence the use of the phrase *מעשה ידיך*) or a divine warrior, but the question is whether that creative activity yields good results.

In any case, the second pattern of body parts in the Psalter and Job concerns knowledge and perception. The texts assume an epistemic linkage among body parts used for cognition, the divine knower, and the user of the text, for whom the bodily imagery is textualized, thus evoking its iconicity in the minds of the poems' audiences. In a range of texts, the "praying I" of the Psalter asks the deity to use the eye (Pss 33:18; 34:16; 116:15) or ear (Pss 5:2; 10:17; 17:1, 6; 18:7; 31:3; 39:13; 54:4; 55:2; 71:2; 80:2; 84:9; 86:1, 6; 88:3; 102:3; 116:2; 130:2; 140:7; 141:1; 143:1) to attend to the petition under consideration and thus to acknowledge the petitioner's worthiness (being worthy because cognizant of unworthiness) and need. In other words, the divine body part serves not to perceive everything whatsoever but the particular moral narrative of the person praying the psalm. For Yhwh/Elohim to see or hear implies the validation of that moral narrative and thus a precise link between the functioning of the body part and the moral quality of both the perceiver and the perceived. An ancient analogue to contemporary virtue epistemology seems to be in play.

This basic connection underlies statements about humans' use of eyes and ears, as well, for the Psalter by and large operates with a very sharp contrast between the good and the wicked, whose eyes and ears fit their characters and the

content of their perception.³⁹ It rests on a conception stated in Ps 94:9 but assumed almost everywhere else: הנטע און הלא ישמע אם יצר עין הלא יביט (“cannot the one planting the ear also hear, and the one fashioning the eye also see?”). In other words, a close relationships exists between the creator’s use of body parts and those intended for humankind, making the wicked’s abuse of their embodiment all the more culpable, but also framing the world as a particular sort of panopticon or panaudion in which cognition flowing from sense perception has a strong moral overtone. The move from such a view to Philo’s covers less distance than one might otherwise imagine.

In any case, the third pattern concerns body parts guaranteeing order, the divine feet (רגלים) and, perhaps surprisingly, the heart (לב/לבב). In contrast to human feet, which totter or slip without divine aid (Pss 18:34; 25:15; 31:9; 38:17; 40:3; 56:14; 66:6, 9; 73:2; 91:12; 94:18; 116:8; Job 13:27; 30:12; 33:11) or can be used either to pursue either good or evil (Pss 119: 59, 101; Job 31:5), the divine feet sit enthroned (Ps 18:10; 99:5; 132:7) even if their movement toward vigorous

³⁹ Accordingly, the righteous may use their eyes to discern the difference between good and evil (Pss 6:8; 31:10; 19:9; 32:8; 92:12; cf. Job 7:7; 17:2, 7; 29:11), the deliverance of God (Pss 54:9; 119:123; 123:2; 145:15), or his or her own wretchedness and need (Ps 88:10; cf. 116:8 [which does not emphasize seeing, but weeping]). The same persons may use their ears to hear Torah or wisdom (Pss 44:2; 49:2; 78:1; Job 12:11 = 34:3; 13:1; 29:11; 36:10, 15; 42:5) or to track danger from evil (Ps 92:12) At the same time, the eyes of the wicked are defective, allowing them only to perceive evil (Pss 17:11; 18:28; 35:19; 73:7; 101:5; cf. Job 11:20; 17:5; 21:8), while their ears also lead them astray (Pss 58:5; Job 15:21). In short, most of the Psalm texts examined here deal in stereotypes, in which the body part, the character of their possessor, and the outcome of their actions closely correlate (i.e., the hands of good people do not do wicked things). This clichéd presentation of human agency provokes Job’s counter-liturgical interrogations, and in particular his questioning of the deity’s willingness to listen to him even if he could make his petition heard (Job 9:16 – אם קראתי ויענני לא אאמין כי יאזין קולי [“If I called out and he answered me, I am unsure he would listen to my voice”]). In other words, as his “friends” realize, he questions the morality of the deity, thus simultaneously reinforcing the assumed connection between bodily function and character by assuming that the deity’s body should signify an attachment to justice, while also undercutting the same claims by arguing that the divine body fails to function properly.

action is always a latent possibility. The striding god gives way here to the sitting god. Similarly, texts describing the divine heart do not primarily focus purely on cognition, but on the moral order. Hence Ps 33:10-11's contrast between the easily defeated plans of the troublous nations and the invincibility of Yhwh's: "Yhwh's counsel remains forever, his plans from generation to generation" (עצת יהוה לעולם) (תעמד מחשות לבו לדר ודר). This does not mean that Yhwh merely has correct knowledge, but that his benevolent ideas fitly impinge upon human life.

Similar views underlie the questioning of divine morality in Job. So Job 7:17 asks in an odd sort of echo of Ps 8, מה אנוש כי תגדלנו וכי תשית אליו לבו ("what is the human that you magnify him or that you put your heart on him"), not whether Yhwh has correct knowledge of humanity but whether his actions toward them make for justice. Again, Job 10:13 asks whether Eloah's heart contains proper information about Job's own life as a righteous person now suffering unduly and thus the proper order of the universe ("and these things you hid in your heart; I know that this is with you"; ואלה צפנת בלבבך ידעתי כי זאת עמך), thereby inverting the dominant conception of the deity's heart as a place of moral order based on a proper understanding of humanity. As Jones and Erickson have argued in different ways, body discourses within Job provide an avenue for the discussion of divine and human agency and character.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Scott C. Jones, "Corporeal Discourse in the Book of Job," *JBL* 132 (2013): 845-63; Amy Erickson, "'Without My Flesh I will See God': Job's Rhetoric of the Body," *JBL* 132 (2013): 295-313.

To summarize, then, the three patterns of the use of the divine body parts in liturgical and related texts shows a sophisticated consideration of the nature of divine embodiment on the part of their composers. Far from being a crude, unexamined set of metaphors, the bodily imagery in the Psalter, and especially in Job, evinces a deep consideration of the connection between embodiment and agency, on the one hand, and their relationship to the moral structure of existence on the other. In other words, the texts seem to reflect concerns that are different from, but related to, those of the later tradition as seen in Philo. The earlier texts offer a different solution than his, opting for a divine body that functioned morally all the time rather than no body at all, but there is a connection. This connection should become clearer when one considers the following texts, which I take in what I take to be the reverse order of their composition.⁴¹

Job 10. In response to Bildad's claims of El's sublime, though inscrutable justice in chapter 8, Job 9-10 offers a detailed critique of the deity's motives, with chapter 9 anticipating Yhwh's speech in Job 38 (though not in a straightforward way), and chapter 10 doing the same, with direct reference to Yhwh's reflections on his own body and its proper uses in 38:34 and 40:9. To be specific, Job 10:3-11 begins an imagined challenge to Eloah. To preempt the divine interrogation, Job couches his insinuating questions in regarding divine injustice in bodily terms:

⁴¹ Job comes from Persian period, probably the fifth century, as does Ps 115. Ps 135 appears, at least to me, to be a reworking of Ps 115 and must therefore be later. Ps 97 seems to come from the seventh or even eighth century and to be part of a complex of psalms celebrating the divine monarch in ritual. As with many other things in Hebrew Bible studies, this relative chronology is debatable, though I think it makes the best sense of the evidence. The precise dating is not crucial for my overall argument, however. The point is that the ideas in these texts well antedate the theological work of Philo or other Hellenistic-era thinkers.

Is it good for you to oppress⁴²
 by rejecting (מאם) the work of your hands (יגיע כפך)
 and privileging the scheme of the wicked?
 Have you eyes of flesh (עיני בשר),
 or do you see as a human sees?
 Are your days like a man's days, your years like a guy's days?
 Is this why you seek out my iniquity and search for my sin?
 Though your information must be that I am not evil,
 your hand (ידך) fails at rescue (מציל)!
 Your hands (ידיך) have twisted (עצב)⁴³ me and made me;
 then one and all⁴⁴ you swallow me up!
 Remember, please, that you made me like clay
 and will turn me to dust.
 Did you not pour me like milk and craft me like cheese?
 With skin (עור) and flesh (בשר) have you attired me,
 and knitted⁴⁵ me together in bones (בעצמות) and sinews (גידים). (Job
 10:3-11)

The text argues that Eloah's actions are unbecoming, incoherent on their own terms and unworthy in view of the frailty of their victim.

The body appears under several aspects here. Verse 4 asks whether Eloah has fleshly eyes. Assuming that the eye functions as a gatherer of appropriate knowledge, and that a deity must need one of a capacity sufficient to gather

⁴² The LXX translators were apparently uncomfortable with some parts of this interrogation. Accordingly, v. 4b is obelized perhaps because the question seemed absurd or at least redundant, though the similarly redundant v. 5b is not deleted. On the tendency to obelize in the first part of Job less often than later, see the discussion in Claude Cox, "Job," in *The T. & T. Clark Companion to the Septuagint* (ed. James K. Aitken; London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 385-400. On the other hand, in v. 3, MT's second person תעשק ("you oppress") becomes the first person ἀδούλωσ.

⁴³ See the discussion in David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20* (WBC 17; Dallas: Word, 1989), 221; John Gray, *The Book of Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 203

⁴⁴ The Hebrew יחד סביב is difficult. See the discussion in E. Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (trans. Harold Knight; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 149, who argues for "afterwards." I have opted for a less temporally specific translation, reflecting the possibly deliberate ambiguity of the original.

⁴⁵ Or "wove" as in C. L. Seow, *Job 1-21: Interpretation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 588-89. Though perhaps אסככני is (also?) a pun on a the (unattested) Polel of סוך ("to hedge"), which would give an echo of Job 38:8. On Job's tendency to use rare words and neologisms, see N. H. Tur-Sinai, *The Book of Job: A New Commentary* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sepher, 1957), viii-xxx; Edward L. Greenstein, "The Invention of Language in the Poetry of Job," in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines* (ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier; Atlanta: SBL, 2013), 331-46.

information for just dealings (since justice cannot operate without knowledge), Job entertains the possibility that the deity's eye is limited to the capacities of a human being. The phrase עיני בשר ("eyes of flesh") signals a theme to which the character Job returns repeatedly, the frailty and vulnerability of בשר. In Job 3-31, Job is the only character who refers to "flesh," and he does so in the context of creation to emphasize human limitations (12:10; 6:12), or as the subject of illness and decay (7:5; 14:22; 19:20, 22; 21:6; 31:31). For the character Job, "flesh" is never anything but a limit, even in the controversial text 19:26 ("outside my flesh, I shall see Eloah").⁴⁶

By first considering and then rejecting the idea that the deity might have a fleshly eye, i.e., a body like a human being's, Job underscores his own confusion. Since Eloah's eye is not "flesh," he must know Job's innocence and persecute him anyway. The divine body should function to exclude unworthy acts and feelings, not to enhance them, and so Job puzzles over why Eloah would at once create an extraordinarily beautiful creation and then allow, much less cause, it to fall apart.⁴⁷ Such misuse of the divine body becomes clear in verse 8, which claims that Eloah's "hand" (יד) has turned from its earlier salvific purpose of creating a human body to the more sinister one of oppressing it. In short, then, Job considers the possibility

⁴⁶ And in this sense his view differs slightly from the more widespread view that בשר is the common property of all human beings; see broader discussion in Christl M. Maier, "Körper und Geschlecht im Alten Testament: Überlieferungen zur Geschlechterdifferenz," in *Menschenbilder und Körperkonzepte im Alten Israel, in Ägypten und im Alten Orient* (ed. Angelika Berlejung, Jan Dietrich, and Joachim Friedrich Quack; ORA 9; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2012), 183-207.

⁴⁷ On the text's emphasis on the extraordinariness of creation, see Friedrich Horst, *Hiob* (BK 16/1; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1968), 155-56.

that Eloah's splendid body works differently from a human's, but this different form of embodiment does not lead to justice.

Why? Verses 9-11 imply an answer: Eloah has forgotten the nature of Job's body as clay/dust, as well as the prenatal process of coagulating or clothing such a body, imagery that underscores the body's softness, fragility, and earthiness, in contrast to the divine body's opposing qualities. (The shifting images also seem to suggest the poet's awareness of the multivalent possibilities of metaphor, as many other features of the book would lead one to expect.⁴⁸) The deity's own body's failures have led him to misunderstand and mistreat the body of a human being.

How does this text bear on the question of divine disembodiment, then? Clearly, Job does not imagine a deity completely lacking a body. But the book does ask about (1) the differences between human and divine bodies (the latter is not merely larger or more powerful, but differs in kind; therefore, analogies to human bodies become of limited value); (2) limits on the adaptability of Eloah's body (Job rejects the idea that the deity can take "fleshly" form, because such form would lead to the very moral failures that both Job (and much later, Philo) fears, thus distinguishing itself from the JE notions of what Esther Hamori has called "human theophany"⁴⁹ and apparently opting for something like the Deuteronomic notion that the deity resides only in heaven); and (3) most importantly, the links between morality (read: responsibility, accountability, self-awareness, other-awareness) and

⁴⁸ As shown by the study of metaphor in Job by Edward L. Greenstein, "Some Metaphors in the Poetry of Job," in *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin* (ed. Maxine L. Grossman; Bethesda, Md.: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 179-95.

⁴⁹ Esther J. Hamori, "When Gods Were Men": *The Embodied God in Biblical and Near Eastern Literature* (BZAW 384; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 2008).

embodiment, with the explicit linkage of the two putting in place a basic notion of Philo's, namely that embodiment related to moral agency in a causal way. Job does not go as far as Philo, but the gap is not a large one.

The gap is bridged in part, moreover, within the LXX rendering of Job 10 and other texts. As Annette Weissenrieder has argued in a recent discussion of a narrow aspect of the LXX's rethinking of the imagery of skin and other fleshly features, the Greek translators both drew on contemporary medical knowledge in their understanding of skin as both a boundary for the body and a porous access point to its interior.⁵⁰ They did not simply render their Hebrew base text in a word-for-word fashion. In Job 10, in particular, the language of the body underwrites reflection on the moral world of deity and God's human's subjects, grounding that relationship in a mutual commitment that should preclude excessive suffering on the part of the latter by means of the superior perceptiveness of the former. Again, this view is not precisely that of Philo, but neither is it distant from it.

Psalms 115 and 135. To take a second example, a few psalmic texts seem to be direct predecessors of Philo's notion that a body befitting God could not exist. In these older texts, however, the reverse is under consideration, i.e., that a body perceptible by human beings could not be that of a real deity because such a body's sensory and locomotive organs were defective. Again, one should expect liturgical

⁵⁰ Annette Weissenrieder, "Body Discourse in Job: translation of Skin and Flesh from עור בשר עור to δέμα, βύρσα or σάρξ," in *Die Septuaginta – Orte und Intentionen: 5. Internationale Fachtagung veranstaltet von Septuaginta Deutsch (LXX.D), Wuppertal 24.-27. Juli 2014* (eds. Siegfried Kreuzer, Martin Meiser, and Marcus Sigismund; WUNT 361; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2016), 580-96. It is interesting that one of the more unabashed treatments of divine bodily display is omitted from the OG of Job (Job 36:29-37:7a), though admittedly other large minuses do not seem to have such a theme (e.g., Job 21:28-33; 26:5-11; 34:28-33), and so I am unprepared at this time to make too much of the Greek tradition's recasting of this set of inherited ideas.

texts to expatiate on the divine body, given their interest in divine agency. Israel's texts do so, as already noted, but they also contain reflections on defective divine bodies as well.

Two closely related texts, Pss 115:5-8 and 135:15-18, thus emphasize the saving presence of Yhwh by denigrating the bodies of foreign deities.⁵¹ Though the text seems to share the assumptions of Sommer's non-fluidity traditions (note Ps 115:3's "and our God is in the heavens" [וואלהינו בשמים]) they do not speculate on the question of whether other deities own fluid bodies, i.e., how divine statues relate to the beings whose names they bear.⁵² Without prejudice as to the location of the various divine bodies, the poems instead simply signal the other deities' lack of bodily functionality and therefore their dissociation from any social network characterized by justice. Thus Ps 115:4-8 says,

Their "idols" (עצבהם) are silver and gold,
the work of human hands (מעשה ידי אדם).
They have a mouth (פה) but do not speak,
eyes (עינים) but do not see,
Ears (אזנים) but do not hear, a nose (אף) but do not breathe (יריחון).
Their hands (ידיהם) do not feel (מוש), nor their feet (רגליהם) walk.
They do not make a sound in their throat (גרונם).

⁵¹ Though for strictures on the cultic origins of Ps 115, see Walter Beyerlin, *Im Licht der Traditionen: Psalm LXVII und CXV, Ein Entwicklungszusammenhang* (VTSupp 45; Leiden: Brill, 1992), 51-55. The question at stake is not one of "Gott als Person und die Götter im Bild" or of divine freedom of action; *contra* Klaus Seybold, *Die Psalmen* (HAT 1/15; Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1996), 451, 504; and similarly, Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 101-150* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 284.

⁵² For one major example, the ritual preparation of the Mesopotamian cult image to become a fit receptacle for the divinity, see Christopher Walker and Michael Dick, *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia: The Mesopotamian Mīs Pī Ritual* (SAA 1; Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001); D. Shibata, "A Nimrud Manuscript of the Fourth Tablet of the Series *Mīs Pī*, CTN IV 170 (+) 188, and a *Kiutu* Incantation to the sun God," *Iraq* 70 (2008): 189-204; Michael B. Dick, "Prophetic Parodies of Making the Cult Image," in *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth: The Making of the Cult Image in the Ancient Near East* (ed. Michael B. Dick; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 1-53. It does seem clear that 2 Isaiah's caricature of cult images was just that – a caricature.

Their makers will be like them, all who trust in them.⁵³

Similarly, Ps 135:15-18 offers a litany of the idols' failures:

The idols of the nations are silver and gold,
the works of human hands.
They have a mouth but do not speak, eyes but do not see.
They have ears but do not hear;
also there is no wind in their mouth (אף אין יש רוח בפיהם).
Their makers are like them, all who trust in them.⁵⁴

Both psalms continue with a call to various parts of the community to join in praising the true God, whose body functions properly to rule the world. Clearly, Pss 115 and 135 arose out of similar religious settings that celebrated the restored community's viability and divine favor.

A number of issues immediately come to mind here, such as the relationship of this text to Second Isaiah (who influenced whom?),⁵⁵ the psalm composers' knowledge of rituals associated with the production of cult images in neighboring cultures,⁵⁶ and the Psalm texts' understanding of the relationship between the

⁵³ The LXX version of this material (Ps 113:12-16) is an expansive text with five minor pluses in this unit alone. The most significant plus, however, appears in Ps 113:11 (= v. 115:3 in L), which adds after בַּשָּׁמַיִם the phrase *en tois ouranois kai en tē gē* ("in heaven and in earth"), which might indicate a more fluid conception of the divine body than MT's and thus might be more original.

⁵⁴ The LXX of Ps 134 (= MT Ps 135) closely follows the MT text except in v. 17, where the LXX has a four-line plus that adds more body parts to the disappointing anatomy of the idols: *hrinas echousin kai ouk osphranthēsontai, cheiras echousin kai ou psēlaphēsousin, podas echousin kai ou peripatēsousin, ou phōnēsousin en tō laryngi autōn* ("they have noses but cannot smell, hands but cannot touch, feet but cannot walk, nor do they speak in their throat"). This extra material may be an addition, owing to a somewhat morbid desire by some copyist, in Greek or in Hebrew, to exhaust the range of body parts. However, it is also possible to explain the shorter text as the result of parablepsis, since *hrinas* must translate אף, also the first word in 135:17b (= LXX 134:17f).

⁵⁵ I am not confident that we can date these texts relative to each other. But for a different view, see the informative study of Angelika Berlejung, *Die Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderpolemik* (OBO 162; Freiburg/Göttingen: Universitätsverlag/Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), esp. 400.

⁵⁶ It is possible that their knowledge was fairly superficial, since the rituals in question were carried out by the priests and a small number of others (often the king) and many of the incantations related to the rituals were in Sumerian and therefore unintelligible to all but a few first-millennium scholars. However, the content of the psalms seems to point in the opposite direction. Both psalms emphasize the human creators

statue and the deity. We should avoid reading the psalmist's view as though it reflected a modernist assumption that the statues were merely fetishes, and his description of them as a commonsense take on their immobility (such as one might see in "Bel and the Dragon," for example).⁵⁷ The psalmist may simply assume (1) that gods do not inhabit the statues (they are not avatars of the gods), or (2) that the statues' inactivity signifies the impotence of the gods related specifically to events affecting Israel, rather than actions in general. The liturgical function of the text and its brevity militate against a final resolution of this point.

What is clear, however, is that Pss 115 and 135, like Job 10, assume that a god worthy of the name would inhabit a capable body, and that the use of this body would have profound implications for human society, and especially Israel. Such a body would have organs allowing two-way communication with worshipers, for example.⁵⁸ Agency would befit the nature of the body, and thus the social relationships dependent upon the divine body as a sign system would befit the moral qualities of a deity. In this case, Yhwh's body allows him to order the world so

of the images and the materiality of their construction. However, the incantations themselves (notably Incantation Tablets 2 and 3 in the edition of Walker and Dick; the tablets exist in multiple copies, indicating their "canonical" status) underscore the power of the gods to animate the image, which, the texts repeatedly emphasize, its creators made of the finest available natural materials, in response to correctly carried out rites. The great gods can enable the statue's power to eat and hear, in particular (Tablet 3, Section B, ll. 36-37 [Walker and Dick, *Induction*, 134, 149]). By emphasizing the human side of the act of statue-creation, then, the psalms simply deny the divine side, and therefore the power of the rituals and the ability of the image to iconize divinity (or divinity to vivify the image, for that matter).

⁵⁷ But see Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen 2* (BKAT 15/2; 2nd ed.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener/Moers, 1961), 2:788.

⁵⁸ Note the comment on this text and the theme of divine speaking here and in Habaquq by L. Alonso Schökel and Cecilia Carniti, *Salmos II (Salmos 73-150): Traducción, introducciones y comentario* (3rd ed.; Estella, Navarra: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1999), 1409. They note that the texts often fault the idols both for being unable to speak and for speaking falsely ("Habacuc combina dos cosas al parecer inconciliables, la mudez y la falsedad de sus oráculos[(Hab 2,18-19]"). This observation, made almost in passing, points to the important social dimensions of the divine body, i.e., its power to communicate to an audience in intelligible, if mediated, ways.

that Israel assumes its proper role, while the nations, in their futility and obtuseness, assume theirs.⁵⁹

Moreover, the psalmist, like Second Isaiah, also is reticent to describe Yhwh's body except by way of contrast. Here the text is in good company with the liturgical traditions embedded in the Psalter, which often point to the obscuration of the divine body (dwelling in clouds or gloom),⁶⁰ or to what may be avatars (הדר, הוד), כבוד, פנים⁶¹ rather than a detailed description beyond those received from the earliest traditions about Yhwh's arms, hands, eyes, and ears. And perhaps most significantly, the manifest body of the idols contrasts sharply with the hidden body of Yhwh, with the absence of the image signifying the presence of the deity and vice versa. Hiddenness equals power and moral legitimacy, while visibility equals powerlessness to effect positive change.

Whence does such an understanding of hiddenness as manifestation derive? Without addressing the very complex question of whether the temples of Jerusalem and other Israelite sites ever had an image of Yhwh, it does seem clear that by the time these psalms were composed, no such image existed, if it ever had. The absence of the image, as well as its possible presence unquestionably triggered theological reflection. So, Bernhard Duhm may not have been far from the mark when he commented more than a century ago on Ps 115,

⁵⁹ On the role of Israel in the Psalm, see already Eduward König, *Die Psalmen eingeleitet, übersetzt, und erklärt* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1927), 141-42.

⁶⁰ As in, e.g., Deut 4:11; 5:19(22); 2 Sam 22:9-10 = Ps 18:9-10; 1 Kgs 8:12 = 2 Chron 6:1; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15. The theophanic language, some of it quite ancient, referred to darkness (ערפל) and its synonyms as signs of the divine presence.

⁶¹ See the discussion in Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 58-79.

Die heidnischen Kleinbürger, die unter ihnen auftauchten oder unter denen sie lebten, die fremden Söldner und Leute von ähnlicher Unbildung verstanden den bildlosen Monotheismus so wenig, wie jener russische Hausierer, der im Hause eines Protestanten vergebens nach dem Heiligen in der Nische sich umschaute und staunend ausruft: Ihr habt ja gar keinen Gott!⁶²

Or, rather, the psalms presuppose the opposite cultural interaction: Israelite singers knew that their neighbors' gods possessed statues (again, the fluid divine body), but for the psalmists, the absence of the image meant the presence of deity, not the reverse.

It is noteworthy that Philo cites Pss 115(113):4-8 (*Decal.* 74 [80,2]), 115(113):17 (*Fug.* 59 [144,6]), and 135(134):15-18 (*Decal.* 74 [80,2]), indicating his awareness of these texts and their suitability to his overall theological program. The roughly 49 citations of 34 different psalms in Philo (as listed in *Biblia Patristica* at any rate) indicate a significant attachment to these texts and their spirituality on Philo's part.⁶³

Psalm 97. Such mixture of obscuration and revelation occurs overtly in the earlier Psalm 97,⁶⁴ which announces the cosmic response of rejoicing at Yhwh's kingship (cf. Job 38:7) and then turns to the paradoxical ways in which humans experience it.

Cloud and gloom envelope him; equity and justice bolster his throne.
Fire proceeds from him and it blazes around his foes.
His lightning bolts illumine the dry land; the earth sees (רִאֲתָהּ) and quakes.
Mountains melt like wax, they flow away from Yhwh, away from the lord of
all the earth.

⁶² Bernhard Duhm, *Die Psalmen* (KHAT 16; Leipzig/Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1899), 259.

⁶³ See also the fundamental study of David T. Runia, "Philo's Reading of the Psalms," *SPhilo* 13 (2001): 102-21.

⁶⁴ I do not accept the attempts of Hossfeld and Zenger (*Psalmen 51-100*, 675-77) to situate the psalm in a period contemporary with the later stages of Isaiah or to split vv. 10-12 off from the rest. The arguments adduced for such a reconstruction of the Psalm's history seem entirely circular, and their dating quite arbitrary. Again, however, the precise dating of the psalm is not crucial for the present argument.

The heavens announce his equity, and all the peoples see (ראו) his glory.
All who serve an image are ashamed, those lauding godlets (אללים). All the
gods bow to him. (Ps 97:2-7)

The heavy influence of traditional language, ultimately deriving from pre-Israelite originals, colors the text, whatever its logic in its current setting amid other *YHWH-mālak* psalms.⁶⁵ Whatever the date and purpose of the psalm itself,⁶⁶ the presence of the bodily imagery and its careful delimitation indicate a complex view of Yhwh's body, while contravening our desire for clear-cut historical trajectories. What is that view?

The psalm plays on the paradox of obscurity and revelation. On the one hand, Yhwh's body is hidden by darkness, yet the darkness exists in a reality in which abstractions such as צדק and משפט support the divine throne, i.e., characterize the reign of the deity. On the other, the theophany appears to all the cosmos so that the landmass sees it (v. 4), as do the "all the peoples" (כל העצים; v. 6), a group that may or may not be coextensive with the "servants of an image" (כל עבדי) in v. 7. They see Yhwh's כבוד, which seems to be more than the visible effects of volcanism or thunderstorm, but rather something closely identified with the nature

⁶⁵ For an attempt to situate the psalm in the context of Pss 96-99, see E. N. Ortlund, "An Intertextual Reading of the Theophany of Psalm 97," *SJOT* 20 (2006): 273-85. The extent to which the traditional language can even produce textual incoherence drew the attention of older commentators such as T. K. Cheyne, *The Book of Psalms or the Praises of Israel: A New Translation, with Commentary* (New York: Whittaker, 1888), 269.

⁶⁶ For an Assyrian-period date, see Flynn, *YHWH is King*; Seybold, *Psalmen*, 368, 383 (though with expansion). Others date the psalm later, as in Samuel Terrien, *Psalms, The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (ECC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 681; or as having several postexilic stages as in Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger, *Psalmen 51-100* (HThKAT; Freiburg: Herder, 2000), 676. For the purposes of this study, the date is not crucial, since the Second Temple period readers of the psalm presumably had access to it in its extant form (even if some copyists felt free to rework other psalms at times; see the discussion of Ps 115 above).

of the deity, as in P, just as the צדק announced by the heavens has a life beyond its manifestations in the human world (cf. v. 2).⁶⁷

The psalm assumes a particular view of the structure of the cosmos, characterized by a series of binary oppositions:

Yhwh is king	The Elilim are impotent
Yhwh's followers are vindicated	The servants of the other gods are humiliated
The cosmos witnesses Yhwh	Parts of the cosmos are reconfigured (melted)

These alternatives, which reveal an understanding of human society as part of a mythopoeically conceived cosmic structure, assume a sharp contrast between Yhwh and the other deities. The text does not make explicit the nature of the other beings other than through an oblique reference to the aniconic traditions of Israel (each אליל is a פסל), but like Ps 115, Ps 97 does understand the other deities as incapable of defending their followers and thus neither reigning, nor having obscured bodies, nor being characterized by justice and equity.

This last point seems most significant. Bodies are always social entities, not merely biological ones. Divine images evoke what Christopher Frechette, in his study of the Mesopotamian hand-lifting prayers, has called “mental iconography.”⁶⁸ In other words, bodies, their parts, and gestures or motions with them, exist within

⁶⁷ See the discussion in Sommer, *Bodies of God*, 227 n. 83.

⁶⁸ Christopher G. Frechette, *Mesopotamian Ritual-prayers of “Hand-lifting” (Akkadian Šuillas): An Investigation of Function in Light of the Idiomatic Meaning of the Rubric* (AOAT 379; Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), 31.

networks of associations in the minds of those seeing them. They signify relationships of all sorts, never more so than when the body in question belongs to a monarch, especially a divine one. Here the obscured body of Yhwh signifies the hope of Judah (v. 8's בְּנוֹת יְהוּדָה) and all the events that flow from that. "Seeing" the unseeable, in however mediated or indirect a way (through ritual or prayer in the first instance), opens the door to a newly imagined world for the psalmist's audience. Thus the invisible divine body comes to signify all that is noble and moral, even as its apercibility signifies the as yet unrealized possibilities of benevolent order, i.e., justice in the world.

Conclusions

To conclude, then, these preliminary soundings have addressed a fundamental question in the history of the theology deriving from Israel's texts, i.e., in what ways one can properly speak of divine embodiment and thus selfhood. Recent scholarship has shown that ancient Israel assumed that Yhwh possessed a real body, undoubtedly of magnificent proportions and extraordinary capacities. Moreover, this body related to the bodies of humans and other created beings, in the complex layers of submission and beneficence fittingly characterized by the label "kingship." At some point, though the bodily and kingly imagery survived in many forms, the traditions deriving from Israel, and Philo in particular, disconnected embodiment from divine agency, and thus divine morality, on the assumption that embodiment was unbecoming of the single, flawless deity. How that transition occurred remains an important question.

Here I have sought to argue that the transition did not occur as a dramatic break – certainly the earliest known representatives of the disembodied position did not experience the shift as a caesura. Rather, at least some texts, probably relatively late in origin and born out of the intense reexamination of ancient traditions necessitated by the tragic end of the Israelite monarchies owing to successive foreign invasions between 722 and 586 BCE – though we do not know this for sure, as Peter Machinist has recently cautioned in reference to Psalm 82⁶⁹ – offered a view of the divine body that distanced it from the language of referentiality implied in, say, JE’s depiction of Yhwh supping with Abraham, or MT Exodus 24:11’s bald “and they saw Elohim” (ויחזו את־האלהים). An apophatic approach to divine embodiment (no “flesh,” no sexual organs, no locomotive parts, no interior systems except for knowing things) can shift, it would seem, to a view in which bodily imagery is completely non-referential. In other words, while the biblical Yhwh possesses a body, it is one of a very strange sort. The strangeness does not lie in the question framed by the internal dispute, to which Sommer has so brilliantly pointed, between beliefs in fluid and non-fluid divine bodies, but at an even deeper level.

The strangeness lies, as Job 10 explains, in whether the divine body is comprehensible to humans at all, and thus whether any language about it has meaning. The relativization of corporeal language is seen in Philo and his successors, and described most influentially in Christian theology by the words of John’s Jesus, according to whom *πνεῦμα ὁ θεός* (John 4:24). These texts and the ideas

⁶⁹ Peter Machinist, “How Gods Die, Biblically and Otherwise: A Problem of Cosmic Restructuring,” in *Reconsidering the Concept of Revolutionary Monotheism* (ed. Beate Pongratz-Leisten; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 236-38.

in them have antecedents of varying distances in the Hebrew Bible itself. Tracing out the development from an incomparable to an incorporeal God thus remains a high desideratum, and I trust that these remarks make a small contribution to the pursuit.