

WHAT IS A GOD LIKE? META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS IN THE LETTER OF JEREMIAH

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ABSTRACT

In the apocryphal text of the Letter (Epistle) of Jeremiah (Ep Jer), a long list of reasons is given by the implied author as to why certain entities alleged to be gods are not in fact such. Brief summaries of the author's various points characterise scholarly perspectives thereon. What has been overlooked in the research, however, and the topic of this article, concerns the converse fact that, in the construction of a negative identity for divinity, the text also assumes a lot about what a god must actually be like. Moreover, what is implicit in these "meta-theistic" presuppositions has never before been identified; hence the need for an attempted inferential reconstruction of what, according to the polemics of Ep Jer, makes a god divine.

INTRODUCTION

Biblical texts take a lot for granted. That is, they presuppose information. One central theme implicit in most Old Testament texts concerns unarticulated beliefs about what a god was assumed to be like (see Smith 2001:vi; McClellan 2013:1). Such "meta-theistic" presuppositions (i.e., nascent ideas about what makes a god divine) are perhaps nowhere as central a concern as in the apocryphal text known as the Letter (or Epistle) of Jeremiah (Ep Jer). This text as a whole is characterised by reiterated phrases where the associated content is focussed on the epistemology of atheology, i.e., how one may know that things alleged to be gods are not in fact such.

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Various versions of the text of Ep Jer have been studied in the context of traditional linguistic, literary, historical, social-scientific, comparative, and theological

perspectives. More specifically, research on the nature of divinity presupposed in the letter has been limited to a reiteration – and the provisioning of some contextual background for – its minimalist theology and extensive polemics against idolatry (cf. Metzger 1957:95–98; Tededche 1962:822–823; Moore 1992:698–706; Kaiser 2004:62–70; Vriezen & van der Woude 2005:542–543; Adams 2014; et al.). To the best of my knowledge, however, no research is available attempting to ascertain what the construction of a negative identity for divinity in turn positively suggests as to what a god in the generic sense of the word was actually presupposed to be like.

A HYPOTHESIS

Every description in Ep Jer of a state of affairs in which the non-divinity of alleged deities is thought to be evidenced (approximating an elaborate negative theology) presupposes a corresponding cluster of necessary conditions for actually being a god. Though covert, these “meta-theistic” presuppositions underlying the polemics of Ep Jer can be identified, reconstructed and synthesised.

METHODOLOGY

Concerning methodology, a descriptive linguistic-philosophical approach will be adopted involving basic presupposition reconstruction.

In this regard, the origin of sustained philosophical engagement with presupposition is often traced back to Strawson’s argument, which was inspired by Frege (Strawson 1950:320–344; Frege 1892:25–50). It was aimed at Russell’s theory of definite descriptions (Russell 1905:497–503; cf. also Sellars 1954:197–215). Within this tradition in analytic philosophy of language, one sentence presupposes another if and only if there is an inherent synchronicity in which the first and the second sentences (and their negations) are simultaneously true.

A philosophical alternative to the Frege-Strawson theory of presupposition emerged in the work of Stalnaker (1972:389–408; 1973:447–457; 1974:197–214;

1998:3–19). Here the analysis focused on what people presuppose when they are speaking, rather than on the actual words they use. In other words, “a pragmatic presupposition associated with a sentence is said to be a condition that a speaker would normally expect to hold in the common ground between discourse participants” (see Beaver & Guertz 2014:n.p.).

Following Grice (1989), many philosophers of language have attempted to reduce presupposition to various combinations of entailment and implicature (Atlas 1976; 1977:321–336; 1979:265–281; Atlas & Levinson 1981:1–61; Kempson 1975; Wilson 1975; Böer & Lycan 1976:1–90; et al.). In the related literature, presuppositional inferences were seen as legitimated via maxims of relevance and quantity (cf. Abbott 2000:1419–1437; Simons 2001:431–448; 2003:251–278; 2004:329–355; 2006:357–372; 2007:1034–1056; Schlenker 2007:325–356; 2008:157–212, et al.).

The philosophical literature was for the most part concerned with unembedded presupposition triggers and triggers under negation, until Karttunen (1973:167–193) argued for the complexity of the projection problem, after which Heim (1982; 1983:114–126) offered the first dynamic semantic account of presupposition. A satisfaction based model was then expounded (cf. Beaver 1992:17–36; Chierchia 1995; Heim 1992:183–221; Zeevat 1992:379–412; et. al.) What distinguishes this approach from those already mentioned is the concept of accommodation. Following Heim (1982), who in turn responded to Lewis (1979:339–359), this was seen as a process whereby contexts are modified for the sake of belief revision when presuppositions are not satisfied.

In this article, the approach to presupposition identification to be followed will not get caught up in the intricacies of mainstream theoretical-linguistic debates. Nor will it take a position for or against a particular theory or point of view. Instead, taking cognisance of what has been discussed in the philosophy of language (more than in linguistics proper) a rather idiosyncratic elementary strategy will be adopted in the service of achieving the objectives of the study.

OBJECTIVES

In this article my concerns will be limited to the progressive reconstruction of Ep Jer's meta-theistic presuppositions as these are implicit in the negation of its polemical propositions. This means that the focus is not on the Letter's affirmative confessional theology (i.e., what it explicitly says about the god of Israel), but on what was taken for granted and not being said in its near-obsession with the epistemology pertaining to the verification of instantiations of the property of being a god. In doing so – and because this has not been done before – it is beyond the scope of this study to engage in detailed dialogue with other scholars writing on basic interpretative issues. The findings of mainstream critical-historical exegesis of the Letter are accepted and will not be brought to bear on arguments, the interests of which lie elsewhere.

OUTLINE

Following a brief introduction to the relevant sections of the text of Ep Jer itself, the discussion to follow will:

- 1) identify the relevant presuppositions in Ep Jer concerned with the overt negative identity of divinity; and
- 2) reconstruct the relevant presuppositions underlying those in (1) so as to reveal the covert and implied positive identity of divinity.

In short, by looking at what the text assumed a god is not, through a negation of the text's own negation (not unlike Hegel's identity through double negation), an attempt will be made to reveal what Ep Jer's polemics took for granted (but obscured) as to what being a god was actually assumed to involve.

THE TEXT VERSION UNDER CONSIDERATION

With regard to the source text to be used, no Hebrew original is available. Even the fragment found at Qumran is in Greek. Though appearing as a separate section in the LXX, the Vulgate has it inserted as the sixth chapter of the book Baruch. In the Coptic

versions, Ep Jer is placed in 4 Baruch in the so-called “Paraleipomena of Jeremiah”. Both Luther’s German translation of the Bible and the KJV feature the Letter as part of the Apocryphal section.

Given the above-noted lack of any definite source text or authoritative manuscript tradition, this article’s concern with meta-theistic presuppositions (rather than with the minutiae of philological and exegetical problems) warrants the experimental use of a standardly accepted English translation based on the oldest and most authentic Greek sources (the NRSV). Where noteworthy inferences have been made from the source-text, or where important variant readings in the ancient versions are attested, they will be indicated within endnotes following the quoted sections.

Cognisance should also be taken of the fact that the quoted materials will be presented in the form of a table with cells and rows, which in turn follow my own idiosyncratic division. That is, they do not reflect the type of thematic demarcation that a structural analysis might come up with. Instead, based on logical-rhetorical internal criteria, the text is sectioned around repetitions of the speaker’s “conclusions”, and that for the sake of the presupposition identification to follow (even though the “conclusions” are not consistently represented or equally spread out).

From an analytic philosophical perspective, whatever one takes the literary genre of Ep Jer to be, it can also be construed as taking the form of a complex and somewhat haphazard extended quasi-informal-logical argument. In fact, it is intentionally represented here to consist of a series of premises, their extensions, and variably reiterated conclusions. No assumptions are made regarding validity, soundness and truth, and nowhere is it implied that the structured reading is what the implied author intended or as what the implied readers would have done – only that such a reading is possible, given the centrality of the theme dealt with and the objectives of the analysis.

Aside from these preliminary remarks, it is for good or ill necessary that the entire relevant section of Ep Jer to be quoted. Since the letter qua chapter is quite long and can make for laborious reading, the reader is asked to bear with me for the next few pages, knowledge of which will have to be assumed in the discussion following thereafter (besides the availability of the text here making it convenient for subsequent

referrals). For present purposes I shall not, however, initiate the reading with verse 1. Instead, we join the speaker from verse 8 onwards where the assumed negative identity conditions of divinity become explicit for the first time. Note also that, for the sake of relevant emphasis, the term “gods” will be highlighted and the quasi-conclusion type sections underlined.

	Ep Jer (NRSV)
A	<p>[8] Their tongues are smoothed by the craftsman, and they themselves are overlaid with gold and silver; but they are false and cannot speak.</p> <p>[9] People take gold and make crowns for the heads of their gods, as they would for a girl who loves ornaments;</p> <p>[10] and sometimes the priests secretly take gold and silver from their gods and spend it upon themselves,</p> <p>[11] and even give some of it to the harlots in the brothel. They deck their gods out with garments like men -- these gods of silver and gold and wood,</p> <p>[12] which cannot save themselves from rust and corrosion. When they have been dressed in purple robes,</p> <p>[13] their faces are wiped because of the dust from the temple, which is thick upon them.</p> <p>[14] Like a local ruler the god holds a scepter, though unable to destroy any one who offends it.</p> <p>[15] It has a dagger in its right hand, and has an axe; but it cannot save itself from war and robbers.</p> <p>[16] <u>Therefore they evidently are not gods; so do not fear them.</u></p>
B	<p>[17] For just as one's dish is useless when it is broken, so are the gods of the heathen, when they have been set up in the temples. Their eyes are full of the dust raised by the feet of those who enter.</p> <p>[18] And just as the gates are shut on every side upon a man who has offended a king, as though he were sentenced to death, so the priests make their temples secure with doors and locks and bars, in order that they may not be plundered by robbers.</p> <p>[19] They light lamps, even more than they light for themselves, though their gods can see none of them.</p> <p>[20] They are just like a beam of the temple, but men say their hearts have melted, when worms from the earth devour them and their robes. They do not notice</p> <p>[21] when their faces have been blackened by the smoke of the temple.</p> <p>[22] Bats, swallows, and birds light on their bodies and heads; and so do cats.</p> <p>[23] <u>From this you will know that they are not gods; so do not fear them.</u></p>
	<p>[24] As for the gold which they wear for beauty -- they will not shine unless someone wipes off the rust; for even when they were being cast, they had no feeling.</p> <p>[25] They are bought at any cost, but there is no breath in them.</p> <p>[26] Having no feet, they are carried on men's shoulders, revealing to mankind their worthlessness.</p> <p>[27] And those who serve them are ashamed because through them these gods are made to</p>

C	<p>stand, lest they fall to the ground. If anyone sets one of them upright, it cannot move itself; and if it is tipped over, it cannot straighten itself; but gifts are placed before them just as before the dead.</p> <p>[28] The priests sell the sacrifices that are offered to these gods and use the money; and likewise their wives preserve some with salt, but give none to the poor or helpless.</p> <p>[29] Sacrifices to them may be touched by women in menstruation or at childbirth. <u>Since you know by these things that they are not gods, do not fear them.</u></p> <p>[30] <u>For why should they be called gods?</u></p>
D	<p>Women serve meals for gods of silver and gold and wood;</p> <p>[31] and in their temples the priests sit with their clothes rent, their heads and beards shaved, and their heads uncovered.</p> <p>[32] They cry loudly and shout before their gods as some do at a funeral feast for a man who has died.</p> <p>[33] The priests take some of the clothing of their gods to clothe their wives and children.</p> <p>[34] Whether one does them evil or good, they will not be able to repay it. They cannot set up a king or depose one.</p> <p>[35] Likewise they are not able to give either wealth or money; if one makes a vow to them and does not keep it, they will not require it.</p> <p>[36] They cannot save a man from death or rescue the weak from the strong.</p> <p>[37] They cannot restore sight to a blind man; they cannot rescue a man who is in distress.</p> <p>[38] They cannot take pity on a widow or do good to an orphan.</p> <p>[39] These things that are made of wood and overlaid with gold and silver are like stones from the mountain, and those who serve them will be put to shame.</p> <p>[40] <u>Why then must any one think that they are gods, or call them gods?</u></p>
E	<p>Besides, even the Chaldeans themselves dishonour them;</p> <p>[41] for when they see a dumb man, who cannot speak, they bring him and pray Bel that the man may speak, as though Bel were able to understand.</p> <p>[42] Yet they themselves cannot perceive this and abandon them, for they have no sense.</p> <p>[43] And the women, with cords about them, sit along the passageways, burning bran for incense; and when one of them is led off by one of the passers-by and is lain with, she derides the woman next to her, because she was not as attractive as herself and her cord was not broken.</p> <p>[44] Whatever is done for them is false.</p> <p><u>Why then must any one think that they are gods, or call them gods?</u></p>
F	<p>[45] They are made by carpenters and goldsmiths; they can be nothing but what the craftsmen wish them to be.</p> <p>[46] The men that make them will certainly not live very long themselves; <u>how then can the things that are made by them be gods?</u></p>

G	<p>[47] They have left only lies and reproach for those who come after. [48] For when war or calamity comes upon them, the priests consult together as to where they can hide themselves and their gods. [49] <u>How then can one fail to see that these are not gods,</u></p>
H	<p>for they cannot save themselves from war or calamity? [50] Since they are made of wood and overlaid with gold and silver, afterwards it will be known that they are false. [51] It will be manifest to all the nations and kings that they are not gods but the work of men's hands, and that there is no work of God in them. [52] <u>Who then can fail to know that they are not gods?</u></p>
I	<p>[53] For they cannot set up a king over a country or give rain to men. [54] They cannot judge their own cause or deliver one who is wronged, for they have no power; they are like crows between heaven and earth. [55] When fire breaks out in a temple of wooden gods overlaid with gold or silver, their priests will flee and escape, but the gods will be burnt in two like beams. [56] Besides, they can offer no resistance to a king or any enemies. <u>Why then must any one admit or think that they are gods?</u></p>
J	<p>[57] Gods made of wood and overlaid with silver and gold are not able to save themselves from thieves and robbers. [58] Strong men will strip them of their gold and silver and of the robes they wear, and go off with this booty, and they will not be able to help themselves. [59] So it is better to be a king who shows his courage, or a household utensil that serves its owner's need, than to be these false gods; better even the door of a house that protects its contents, than these false gods; better also a wooden pillar in a palace, than these false gods. [60] For sun and moon and stars, shining and sent forth for service, are obedient. [61] So also the lightning, when it flashes, is widely seen; and the wind likewise blows in every land. [62] When God commands the clouds to go over the whole world, they carry out his command. [63] And the fire sent from above to consume mountains and woods does what it is ordered. But these idols are not to be compared with them in appearance or power. [64] <u>Therefore one must not continue to think that they are gods nor call them gods,</u> for they are not able either to decide a case or to do good to men.</p>
K	<p>[65] <u>Since you know then that they are not gods,</u> do not fear them. [66] For they can neither curse nor bless kings; [67] they cannot show signs in the heavens and among the nations, or shine like the sun or give light like the moon. [68] The wild beasts are better than they are, for they can flee to cover and help themselves. [69] <u>So we have no evidence whatever that they are gods;</u> therefore do not fear them.</p>

L	<p>[70] Like a scarecrow in a cucumber bed, that guards nothing, so are their gods of wood, overlaid with gold and silver.</p> <p>[71] In the same way, their gods of wood, overlaid with gold and silver, and like a thorn bush in a garden, on which every bird sits; or like a dead body cast out in the darkness.</p> <p>[72] By the purple and linen that rot upon them <u>you will know that they are not gods</u>; and they will finally themselves be consumed, and be a reproach in the land.</p> <p>[73] Better therefore is a just man who has no idols, for he will be far from reproach.</p>
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	<p>Endnotes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 1:9 Gk They b) 1:11 Gk them c) 1:19 Gk they d) 1:20 Gk It is e) 1:24 Lat Syr: Gk they f) 1:27 Gk if they fall g) 1:28 Gk to them h) 1:28 Gk of them i) 1:33 Gk some of their clothing j) 1:41 Gk he k) 1:44 Gk them l) 1:48 Gk them m) 1:52 Meaning of Gk uncertain n) 1:55 Gk they o) 1:63 Gk these things p) 1:72 Cn: Gk marble, Syr silk
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INTRODUCING META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS IN *EPJER*

In Ep Jer's use of the word "gods", it is presupposed that the implied reader understands what a god is, even if the presupposition itself is not the same as the meaning(s) of the word "gods". From this it also follows that knowledge of what makes a god divine is assumed to be a requirement associated with the use of a specific negation of [being] "not gods". This requirement is built into the meaning of the negation of the phrase "not gods", where the concept "the "gods" has to hold with reference to particular entities.

In the jargon of pragmatics, we may therefore say that "not" is a "presupposition trigger", i.e., it triggers awareness of the presence of familiarity with the meaning of the concept "god". In this context, following Stalnaker (1972:389–408; 1974:197–

214), we can also say that the interest of the implied author/reader in why the entities mentioned are not gods, functions as a conversational or pragmatic presupposition. By contrast, any presuppositions about what a god is and which are associated more with specific presupposition triggers are said to be “conventional” or “semantic”.

META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS AND PROJECTION IN EPJER

The hallmark of meta-theistic presuppositions in Ep Jer, and the most thoroughly studied presuppositional phenomenon, is projection (see Langendoen & Savin 1971:373–388; Kripke 2009:367). What is notable is that whereas many of the statements do not follow from any embeddings (at least not according to classical logics), the presuppositions that do follow are projected. To be sure, the inference is more robust in some cases than in others.

In the discussion to follow we shall look at two types of presupposition in the text of Ep Jer, namely 1) presuppositions pertaining to forms of negative identity construction, and 2) presuppositions following from a reconstruction of what a god was actually assumed to be via a legitimate inversion of the first type of presupposition.

RECURRING IDEAS IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NEGATIVE META-THEISTIC IDENTITY IN EP JER

At this point we move from more linguistic-philosophical considerations to more philosophical-theological ones. In the oft-recurring phrases and concepts, five types of negative identity construction are evident (with the corresponding section/verse location of the data added afterwards [see above]).

- 1) Negative identity through strong evidentialism: There should not be any lack of “evidence” whatsoever for a god’s divinity (cf. |A|[16]; |K|[69]).
- 2) Negative identity and epistemic modality: It is not impossible to “know” whether something is a god or not (cf. |B|[23]; |C|[29]; |K|[65]; |L|[72]).
- 3) Negative identity and intentionality: Something should not be wrongly “thought”

to be divine (cf. |D|[40]; |E|[44]; |J|[64]).

- 4) Negative identity and nominalisation: Something should not be wrongly “called” a god (cf. |D|[40]; |E|[44]; |J|[64]).
- 5) Negative identity and phenomenality: Just because something looks like a god (“gold and silver”) does not mean it is divine (cf. |A|[8]; |A|[10]; |D|[39]; |H|[50]; |J|[58]; |L|[70]; |L|[71]).

In the next section, we shall look at propositions triggered in relation to more specifics regarding the negative identity of divinity in Ep Jer.

META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS IN EP JER’S OVERT IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH NEGATION

In the list below, a multiple-alphabetic chronology is followed to list the relevant presuppositions (note: not all possible presupposition, only some immediately triggered and related to the theme of what a god is not; propositions already noted in a) – e) in the previous section are also presupposed) of each of the subsections indicated in the Letter as quoted in full. The need for this arises because of multiple relevant presuppositions in a single verse, which thereby require additional distinctions, e.g. c |A| [8] P > (i.e. “a god is not mute”) (see below). “P >” here stands for the presupposition identified, without further linguistic nuance, e.g. stating the type of sentence involved, e.g. a “factive”, etc..

A

[8]

- a. P > A god’s tongue is not smoothed by craftsman
- b. P > A god is not false
- c. P > A god is not mute

[9]

- d. P > A god does not wear a man-made crown
- e. P > A god does not love ornaments

- [10]
- f. P > a god's treasure cannot be taken
- [11]
- g. P > a god is not decked with garments by people
- [12]
- h. P > a god does not suffer from rust and corrosion.
- [13]
- i. P > A god does not gather dust
- j. P > A god does not need to be cleaned
- [14]
- k. P > A god does not hold a sceptre like a local ruler
- l. P > A god is not unable to destroy what offends it
- [15]
- m. P > A god does is not unable to defend itself with weapons
- [16]
- n. P > A god's eyes are not full of dust
- B
- [18]
- o. P > A god's house does not require security
- [19]
- p. P > A god does not need lamps to see
- [20]
- q. P > A god and its attire cannot be devoured by worms
- [21]
- r. P > A god's face cannot be blackened by smoke
- [22]
- s. P > A god does not allow animals to sit on it
- C
- [24]
- t. P > A god does not need to be shined for beauty

- u. P > A god does not lack sensory feeling
[25]
- v. P > A god is not bought at any cost
- w. P > A god is not without breath
[26]
- x. P > A god does not have to be carried on men's shoulders
- y. P > A god is not worthless
[27]
- z. P > A god does not need to be made to stand not to fall
- aa. P > A god does not need help to move
- bb. P > A god does not require gifts to get up
[28]
- cc. P > A gods money cannot be used for profane purposes
[29]
- dd. P > A god wants sacrifices with salt
- ee. P > A god do not need women to serve it meals
D
[31]
- ff. P > A god's priests do not act inappropriately
[32]
- gg. P > A god is neither dead nor requires shouting
[33]
- hh. P > A god's clothing cannot be taken for other uses
[34]
- ii. P > A god does not fail to repay good or evil
- jj. P > A god is not unable to set up or dispose kings
[35]
- kk. P > A god is mot unable to give wealth or money
- ll. P > A god does not fail to require the payback of a vow
[36]

- mm. P > A god is not unable to save a man from death
- nn. P > A god does not fail to rescue the weak from the strong
[37]
- oo. P > A god is not unable to restore sight to a blind man
- pp. P > A god is not unable to rescue a man in distress
[38]
- qq. P > A god is not unable to pity a widow or do good to an orphan
[39]
- rr. P > A god does not allow its servants to be put to shame
E
[40]
- ss. P > A god does not allow itself to be dishonoured
[41]
- tt. P > A god is not unable to help a dumb man
- uu. P > A god is not unable to understand communication
[42]
- vv. P > A god is not abandoned
[43]
- ww. P > A god does not lack incense
[44]
- xx. P > Things done for a god are not false
F
[45]
- yy. P > A god is not made by craftsmen
- zz. P > A god is not limited to the possibilities of an artisan's imagination
[46]
- aaa. P > A god does not come from something transient
G
[47]
- bbb. P > A god is not something that is a lie

-
- ccc. P > A god is not reproached
[48]
- ddd. P > A god does not need to be hidden in war
[49]
- eee. P > A god is not unable to save itself from war/calamity
H
[50]
- fff. P > A god is not false
[51]
- ggg. P > A god is not the work of men's hands
[52]
- hhh. P > A god is not unable to set up a king over a country
I
[53]
- iii. P > A god is not unable to give rain
[54]
- jjj. P > A god is not unable to judge its own cause
[55]
- kkk. P > A god does not burn up in fire
[56]
- lll. P > A god is not unable to offer resistance to kings and enemies
- mmm. P > A god is not unable to save itself from thieves and robbers
J
[58]
- nnn. P > A god is not unable to be stripped or incapable of helping
themselves
[59]
- ooo. P > Being a god is not worse than a courageous king
- ppp. P > Being a god is not worse than a household utensil that serves its
owner's needs

- qqq. P > Being a god is not worse than the door of a house that protects its contents
- rrr. P > Being a god is not worse than a wooden pillar in a palace
[60]
- sss. P > A god is not unable to command and be obeyed by the sun, moon and stars
[61]
- ttt. P > A god is not unable to command lightning and wind
[62]
- uuu. P > A god is not unable to command clouds
[63]
- vvv. P > A god is not unable to command fire
- www. P > A god does not lack imposing appearance and power
[64]
- xxx. P > A god is not unable to decide a case and do good to men
K
[66]
- yyy. P > A god is not unable to curse or bless kings
[67]
- zzz. P > A god is not unable to shown signs in the sky or among people
- aaaa. P > A god is not unable to shine and give light
[68]
- bbbb. P > A god is not worse ability than wild beasts
- cccc. P > A god is not unable to cover and help itself
L
[70]
- dddd. P > A god should guard things

From such identity construction through negation, the positive identity conditions for being a god can now be extracted and synthesised. In the treatment below, references for the inferences will function in the following manner, e.g. (cf PP > dddd P > |K|

[70]), i.e. the presupposition underlying the presupposition in “a god should guard things.”

RECONSTRUCTING THE COVERT IDENTITY OF DIVINITY IN EP JER

A look at the implied affirmative meta-theistic presuppositions reveals that there are several thematic clusters of related data that emerge related to the question of what being a god was assumed to be like. These are the following, presented in no specific order (Let PP > denote “the affirmative meta-theistic presupposition underlying the negative meta-theistic presupposition...”)

COVERT META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT DIVINE EMBODIMENT

For all its aniconism and iconoclastic rhetoric, the text of Ep Jer still assumes that a god is constituted or formed by something, which, though not specified in terms of material constitution, is presupposed as being much more than artisans wish (cf. PP > zz P > |F| [45]). The author did not assume that a god must be a disembodied spirit; the text clearly presupposes that if something is a god it has a body. This is evident from the presupposition of the presence of mereological parts like a head, a face, eyes, a mouth (with breath), a tongue, a nose, as well as legs on which to stand (cf. PP > d P > |A| [9]; PP > n P > |A| [16]; PP > r P > |B| [21]; PP > w P > |A| [25]; PP > ww P > |G| [43]; PP > z P > |C| [27]). Having various actually working senses, a god can see, speak, hear, walk (i.e. move on its own, from one place to another, as opposed to idols who have bodies but cannot) (cf. PP > aa/bb P > |C| [27]; PP > uu P > |E| [41]; PP > p P > |B| [19]; PP > x P > |C| [26]).

The presuppositions above in turn presuppose all the other parts of an anthropomorphic body, extended in space and present in a specific location. The body of a god is also extended in time, for it is immortal (cf. PP > aaa P > |F| [46]).

However, as will be evident in the cultic presupposition cluster below, this is a possible rather than necessary immortality, if one can call it that (for it requires maintenance and defence). Still, a divine body is generally durable (cf. PP > h P > |A| [12]); it is always fully alive and reactive to outside stimuli (cf. PP > u P > |C| [24]). Not only that, a god is shiny (cf. PP > t P > |C| [24]) and luminous (cf. PP > p P > |B| [19]?). In some sense a god is also fiery, albeit fire resistant, for the lack of a better word (cf. PP > kkk P > |I| [55]). The idea constantly being reiterated is that a god has an able body that is for the most part self-sufficient in terms of performing its expected divine functions.

Also by implication, in another scattered cluster of motifs we the presupposition that to be a god involves actually wearing “garments” (cf. PP > g P > |A| [11]). Yet contrary to those of idols, a god’s attire is, like its body, immune to wasting away for no reason (cf. PP > q P > |B| [20]). Included among things worn by a god the text mentions a crown, even though a god is also somewhat indifferent to ornaments as such (cf. PP > d/e P > |A| [9]). A god’s clothes, like a god’s body, are clean (cf. PP > i P > |A| [13]), even being resistant to being soiled (cf. PP > j P > |A| [13]) and cannot be stripped from a god (cf. PP > nnn P > |J| [58]). Thus a god can cover and dress itself (cf. PP > cccc P > |K| [68]; maintain a proper appearance (cf. PP > www P > |J| [63]), despite the presence of profane entities in its vicinity (cf. PP > s P > |B| [22]).

COVERT META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT THE DIVINE HABITAT

In Ep Jer a god, like idols, has a house (cf. PP > o P > |B| [18]). The difference here is that an actual god will defend it (cf. PP > m P > |A| [15]). Moreover, there where it resides a god is worth much (cf. PP > y P > |C| [26]) and more valuable than ordinary things (cf. PP > ooo...rrr P > |I| [59]). It protects a treasure (cf. PP > f P > |A| [10]). Another underlying presupposition is that in its abode, a god wants to be catered for by male servants (cf. PP > dd/ee P > |D| [29]), who are sensitive to matters related to divine honour and shame (cf. PP > ss P > |E| [40]). A god also wants salted meals (i.e.

sacrifices), specifically served by males (cf. PP > dd P > |C| [29]). Like the idols it requires that incense be burned for its olfactory pleasure (cf. PP > ww P > |E| [43]).

In this sacred space a god allows vows to be made, which must then be fulfilled (cf. PP > ll P > |D| [35]). After all, a god is believed to be a moral being, i.e. not false/a lie (cf. PP > xx/bbb P > |I| [44, 47]); it is wholly beyond reproach (cf. PP > ccc P > |G| [47]). Whether this was assumed to be because of supposed moral perfection – or because might was assumed to make right – is unclear (Euthyphro’s dilemma). The basic presupposition is that a god repays good or evil (cf. PP > ii P > |D| [34]). Yet there is also a darker side to a god: it is able to destroy (cf. PP > l P > |A| [14]). Hence a god’s moral nature as having an inherent duality to it (“killing and making alive”), thus allowing it to have great power (cf. PP > www P > |J| [63]).

COVERT META-THEISTIC PRESUPPOSITIONS ABOUT DIVINE FUNCTIONS

Ep Jer presupposes that if something is a god, it exists in relation to other entities, and usually in a ruling capacity (cf. PP > k P > |A| [14]). A god will never fail to decide either its own cause (cf. PP > jjj P > |I| [54]) or others’ cases (cf. PP > xxx P > |J| [64]). Also presupposed as part of divine functions is to set up or dispose kings over a country (cf. PP > hhh P > |H| [52]). As itself a king, if something is a god it is also an active warrior (cf. PP > hhh P > |I| [48]). Not only does it wield weapons (cf. PP > m P > |A| [15]), it actually fights wars, offering resistance to its enemies, which include (other) kings (cf. PP > ll P > |I| [56]). Conversely, a god is also able to save itself from war/calamity (cf. PP > mmm P > |I| [59]). On a smaller scale, a god is known to be a guardian (cf. PP > ddd P > |L| [70]), able to protect itself from thieves and robbers (cf. PP > mmm P > |I| [56]).

A god also has powers with which to control the world at large, especially the heavens. On the one hand, a god is presupposed as being able to command astronomical entities like the sun, moon and stars (cf. PP > sss P > |J| [60]). This will often not just simply be the normal governing of heavenly bodies but also involves

showing signs in the sky and among people (cf. PP > zzz P > |K| [67]). On the other hand, Ep Jer also presupposes that a god commands meteorological phenomena, especially lightning and wind (cf. PP > ttt P > |J| [61]), as well as clouds (cf. PP > uuu P > |J| [62]). A related function, again anthropocentric, is that a god gives rain to men (cf. PP > qq q P > |I| [53]).

On a more humane level, if something is a god, Ep Jer also presupposes that it must be useful to people. More specifically, a god is known for not only terrifying people (demanding to be feared), but also for doing well to people (cf. PP > xxx P > |J| [64]). For example, a god rescues men in distress (cf. PP > pp P > |D| [37]), saves a man from death (cf. PP > ss P > |D| [36]), helps the weak against the strong (cf. PP > mm P > |D| [36]), restores sight to blind men (cf. PP > oo P > |D| [37]), cures dumbness, and also understands desperate communication directed to it (cf. PP > tt P > |E| [41]). A god takes pity on widows and does what is good to orphans (cf. PP > qq P > |D| [38]). Last but not least, if something is a god it is more than able to give wealth or money (cf. PP > kk P > |D| [35]).

CONCLUSION

From the above inferences from the presuppositions contained in the construction of negative identity for divinity (i.e. all the claims about what is not a god) in the apocryphal text of Ep Jer, it becomes clear what a god was actually assumed to be for the implied author. The latter was thoroughly a child of the time and held beliefs about the nature of divinity that were products of the socio-historically-relative religious context in which he wrote.

In the denial that the entities in question are actual gods, a hypothetical genus of generic divinity is presupposed, the members of which had to satisfy individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for belonging thereto. Yet the prototypical concept of deity in Ep Jer was most assuredly not assumed to be something wholly Other or utterly transcendent. The positive identity conditions for being a god do not add up to the anachronistic profile of the God of classical philosophical theism's

perfect being theology (which some commentators might prematurely wish to project onto the minimalist theology of the god of Israel in the book).

In fact, for the implied author of Ep Jer the idols' major fault did not lie in what the implied antagonists assumed to be generally accepted divine properties, functions and relations. Rather, an ideal member of the genus "gods" (implied but obscured in the rhetoric of Ep Jer) was assumed to differ from false divinities only in respect of not being so apparently dysfunctional. Yet, this was in the very same theological, cultic and moral contexts where all gods, presumed actual or imagined, were generically believed to operate.

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