APOTROPAIC INTERCESSION IN THE HEBREW BIBLE AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

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ABSTRACT

A number of ancient Near Eastern texts depict "apotropaic intercession," that is, human attempts to avert divinely-threatened doom from others. These texts include biblical narratives such as Moses' appeal to YHWH following the sin of the Golden Calf, Neo-Assyrian ritual texts known as namburbû*, and several ritual texts from Anatolia, including the Ritual of Ḫuwarlu (CTH 398) and the Ritual of Papanikri (CTH 476). Two types of speech can be distinguished: "causative" or magical speech, understood to directly affect physical reality, and ordinary speech, which works through the mediation of its listeners' comprehension and will. While most of the rituals use both causative and ordinary speech, intercessors in the biblical passages use only ordinary speech. I argue that this distinction primarily reflects the biblical writers' theological aversion to human use of causative speech, which they consider the province of YHWH alone.*

In the ancient Near East (ANE), including Israel as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, angry gods periodically issued threats of doom in the form of omens, prophecies, or (in some biblical narratives)

direct speech.[1] In Exod. 32:7–10, YHWH warns Moses of his plan to wipe out the Israelites for the sin of the Golden Calf. In Mesopotamia and Anatolia, unfavorable omens revealed the gods' wrath and promised punishment. Rather than passively accepting divinely-decreed doom, human mediators often talked back to the gods in attempts to counter the divine will. Several ritual texts from Anatolia ward off evil omens, while an entire genre of Neo-Assyrian rituals—the *namburbû*—is devoted to this purpose. In biblical narratives, Moses and other intercessors intercede with YHWH on behalf of the targeted people. In Exod. 32:11b–13, Moses responds to YHWH's threat by appealing to YHWH's desire for honor, his compassion, and his oath to the ancestors:

> 11b: Why, O YHWH, does your anger burn against your people whom you brought out from the land of Egypt with great strength and with mighty power? 12 Why should Egypt say, it was with evil in mind that you brought them out, in order to kill them in the mountains, and to annihilate them from the face of the earth? Turn away from your burning anger and relent from the evil meant for your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you made an oath, saying to them, I will multiply your progeny like the stars of heaven, and all this land of which I spoke, I will give to your progeny and they will inherit it forever.

In this essay, I study human interventions on behalf of others in the face of divinely-threatened doom, a process I call "apotropaic intercession." I look at humans' direct discourse in apotropaic intercessory ritual and narrative texts to determine the verbal means used to ward off divine decrees of disaster. In a sample of texts from Anatolia, Neo-Assyria, and the Hebrew Bible, I distinguish two main kinds of human speech, "ordinary" and "causative," as well as a combined form I call "hybrid." As explained below, ordinary speech has no direct effect on the world except by means of its effects on its listeners' thoughts, emotions,

[1] I wish to thank Brent Strawn and Matthew Lynch of Emory University for reviewing an earlier version of this paper. Significant help was also given by Billie Jean Collins.

and will. Causative speech, in contrast, is understood to work directly on the world or its entities through mysterious or magical means. Both types of speech appear in narratives and ritual texts but biblical depictions of apotropaic intercession contain only ordinary speech. In contrast, most—but not all—of the apotropaic intercessory rituals from the ANE contain either causative or hybrid speech. I will argue that this distinction is less a matter of the generic difference between narrative and ritual texts than it is an expression of the different cultures' underlying theology. Biblical writers generally treat causative speech as YHWH's prerogative alone, and depict Israelites as using only ordinary speech.

Before proceeding to the textual analysis, I describe the "drama" of apotropaic intercession and then discuss the different kinds of speech with a view to shedding light on their use in apotropaic intercessory texts, using concepts from speech act theory and cognitive science.

APOTROPAIC INTERCESSION: THE DRAMA

Apotropaic intercession addresses a divine decree of doom, understood as punishment for human offenses. Each apotropaic intercessory text portrays a drama involving three roles: intercessor, beneficiary, and divine authority. As intercessors, ritual practitioners or characters like Moses approach the divine authority (a god or gods) on behalf of a beneficiary (an individual or household in the ritual texts, or an entire people or city in the Bible). Often the recipient of the divine warning is the one who intercedes. The intercessor either speaks or acts on behalf of the beneficiary (for example, by offering sacrifices) or provides access to the deity so that the beneficiary can speak or act on his or her own.[2] In ritual texts, apotropaic intercession often includes speech

[2] These two types of intercession are reflected in Mesopotamian cylinder seals from 2500–1500 BCE, which show personal deities accompanying their beneficiaries into the presence of a seated high god, in one of two forms: either leading the beneficiary by the hand or standing behind the beneficiary who faces the high god directly (Groneberg 1986; Postgate 1992, 132). Some of these seals portray the beneficiary holding his hand over his mouth while the personal deity lifts his hand in greeting,

directed at third parties (for example, ritual helpers or *Kultmittel*) or manual rites of sacrifice or purification. In biblical narrative, apotropaic intercession generally consists of speech alone, sometimes accompanied by prostration. More than a narrative depiction of ritual, it closely resembles what Moshe Greenberg (1983, 7) describes as "prose prayer" defined as a prayer "embedded in the narratives of Scripture," which include prophetic texts as well as stories.

SPEECH ACT THEORY, COGNITIVE SCIENCE, AND MAGIC

In the second half of the 20th century, John Austin and his student John Searle expanded the notion of speech as a form of action. Austin (1975) introduced the widely-used term "performative utterance" to describe speech that "does" as well as "means." According to Austin and Searle, utterances are in fact "speech acts" which carry particular kinds of "illocutionary force"—that is, they *do* certain things in certain contexts. One particular kind of speech act, which Searle (1989) calls a "declaration," creates new social realities by declaring them to be created. A declaration "changes the world in such a way as to bring about the truth of its propositional content" (Searle 1989, 553). For example, the words "I declare you husband and wife," uttered by an authorized officiant to two eligible adults, actually creates a husband and a wife from two unmarried individuals. One feature of most declaratives is that they require "institutional authorization" of the speaker.

Another perspective on speech is offered by cognitive science. Based on research from the past decades, cognitive scientists have argued that young children develop "intuitive" understandings of several different domains, including physics, biology, and psychology (Tremlin 2006, 66–7; Sørensen 2007, 33). Infants learn to predict that a ball rolled over the edge of a table will fall, for example. Studies show infants registering surprise at events that do not meet their expectations. Although all learning is mediated by experience (and therefore culture), this early learning is constrained

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which indicates that the personal deity is speaking for the beneficiary (Maul 1994, 68).

by properties of the natural world, including the human brain. Much of what is learned is therefore universal.

One posited intuitive domain (sometimes called a "module") is language (Tremlin 2006, 69). Language learning touches on the domains of intuitive physics, biology, and psychology as children learn things that speech can and cannot do. For instance, very young children learn that calling out summons a parent (or possibly a pet) but not a rock or a tree, and that requests for cookies require another's assent. In time they learn that "there is a rather limited number of things one can do with language. One can, for example, declare war, apologize for one's bad behavior, or assert that the roof is leaking; but one cannot fry an egg, patch a roof leak, or split an atom with words alone" (Searle and Vanderveken 1985, 51–2).

Yet Searle acknowledges another kind of speech act present in "fairy stories" and some religious contexts, whose effects are not limited to the social world. He calls it the "supernatural declaration." One example he gives is the divine utterance "Let there be light" (Searle 1979, 18; Searle 1989, 549). Such utterances (as presented in religious texts or stories) share the declaration's effect of creating a new reality, but differ in that the reality they create is not an institutional or social one but involves "brute facts." Such speech acts have the illocutionary force of a declaration—a special kind of declaration, which (when uttered by God, at least), requires no institutional authorization.

Rather than adopting the term "supernatural declaration," I class all such utterances as causative speech. Walter Houston (1995) points out that "Let there be light" appears to be a command or "directive"—another type of speech act identified by Searle. This confusion is appropriately handled by Wade Wheelock (1982) who points out that many ritual speech acts have a declarative element to them, in that they create a new reality. Although Wheelock purposely avoids distinguishing between petitions and incantations (what I call ordinary and causative speech), the "declarative" aspect of causative speech is particularly prominent.

Causative speech breaks the intuitive rules for language learned by young children based on their own experiences. Cognitive scientists have studied the way children of different ages react to events that run counter to their intuitive grasp of science. For example, children around age four begin to categorize events

inconsistent with their intuitive science as "magic," whereas five to six-year olds seek ordinary causal explanations (Rosengren and Hickling 2000).[3] Understanding the workings of causative speech relies instead on cultural knowledge. Just as some people learn to accept the existence of agents with counterintuitive properties, including deities or demons, so they may view causative speech as effective in certain contexts, such as religious ritual.

Around age seven, children become capable of understanding some entities and occurrences as both "counterintuitive"—that is, violating the principles of intuitive science—and real. This understanding allows children to accept certain religious concepts. "What seems to happen developmentally is that [older] children acquire a more elaborated supernatural framework that is more intimately tied to supernatural beliefs found in their respective cultures" (Boyer and Walker 2000, 148; cf. Woolley 2000). In these contexts, causative speech has a culturally-determined illocutionary force. Even when causative speech is understood to be effective only in fiction, the audience nonetheless grants it illocutionary force within the world of the story.

Cognitive theorist Jesper Sørensen addresses what I call causative speech under the category of "magic." He describes magic as concerned with "changing the state or essence of persons, objects, acts and events through certain special and non-trivial kinds of actions with opaque causal mediation" (Sørensen 2007, 32). In other words, the process by which magic works its effects is mysterious. Believers in magical efficacy accept the existence of some kind of causality—it is simply a causality that they do not understand in the implicit way that they grasp intuitive science (Sørensen 2007, 91). As McCauley and Lawson (2002, 20) put it, "In religious ritual representations... causal chains terminate; reasons find a final ground. In short, the buck stops with the gods." Magic is thought to work because it has links to the "sacred domain," a mental space containing culturally-transmitted concepts

[3] The authors note that cultural influences as well as individual characteristics strongly affect their findings, which are therefore not universal.

and knowledge in which certain ordinary constraints are lifted (Sørensen 2007, 63–5).

Causative speech, like magic in general, relies on mysterious means for its effects, means which are thought to be possible because of connections between sacred domain and either the words or the speaker or both. Sørensen (2007, 65–74) refers to the connection with the sacred domain, somewhat confusingly, as "magical agency" which can be based in agents (gods, magicians), actions such as incantations, or objects such as magical mirrors and so on. In my texts, the predominant connections with the sacred domain empowering causative language appear to be through the agent (speaker) or action (words). In some cultures, gods are understood to have the ability to use causative language. This property may be seen as transferable to others, either by the gods directly or by means of previously-empowered humans, actions, or objects.[4] For example, in 2 Kgs 2:13, Elijah transfers his God-given ability to work miracles to Elisha by passing on his mantle. Elisha is then able to work his own miracles at will: he has his own connection to the divine, inherent in his person.[5] In other cases, the connection with the sacred domain is understood to inhere in the words themselves—for example, in a spell or incantation. Speakers must be understood as qualified, even if they lack their own link to the sacred domain—just as with ordinary speech acts, particularly declarations. In Mesopotamian myth, the gods Ea/Enki and Marduk/Asalluḫi were understood to have passed on magical rituals to humankind. Certain oral rites in *namburbû* end with the phrase, "[This is] the word of Enki and Asalluḫi."[6] Any qualified

[4] Lawson and McCauley (1990, 84–136) address the transfer of such empowerment from the sacred domain in different terms, in their presentation of "embedded ritual actions"—that is, prior ritual acts which allow a subsequent one to take place, the way that purification of holy water must precede its use.

[5] On this, see also Hadi Ghantous' contribution in this volume.

[6] See, for example, K 2999 + Sm 810 lines 39 and 80–7–19 lines 20'–21'. Other similar or somewhat longer formulas in use from 2500–1500 BCE legitimated the incantations by associating them with the divine. For example, see Cunningham (1997, 31–2, 57, 83, 118–9, 169).

āšipu (ritual practitioner) could then enact the ritual, including the causative words. Unlike Elisha, however, the *āšipu* could not spontaneously utter causative speech outside of prescribed rituals. In this case, the link with the divine which "empowers" causative speech occurs more through the speech itself than through the speaker.

I categorize speech as causative when it appears intended to affect the physical environment directly, for example by transforming objects into sentient entities capable of understanding and acting, or compelling entities directly. Petitions or hymns to a supernatural entity fall into the category of ordinary speech because they operate according to the rules of speech as understood in naïve biology/psychology/physics, even if their audience is understood to be supernatural. Commands to a low-level supernatural entity, however, I consider causative, since ordinarily people cannot command the divine.

I also have a "hybrid" category in which a speech act exhibits both causative and ordinary illocutionary force. Below I classify the speech acts in the selected texts (one Neo-Assyrian *namburbi*, two ritual texts from Anatolia, and two biblical passages) as ordinary, causative, or hybrid.

APOTROPAIC INTERCESSION: A NEO-ASSYRIAN *NAMBURBI*

Like others of its genre, the *namburbi* I examine (LKA 112) is intended to ward off the evil portended by an omen—in this case, the omen of a wildcat that has been continually yowling within a person's house. I chose this *namburbi* because it is both typical and concise. Within its single prescribed oral rite appear many expressions found in other *namburbû* where they are divided among two or more oral rites.

Typically, LKA 112 opens with an introduction stating the ritual's purpose. The intercessor is then instructed to prepare ritual ingredients (including a model wildcat) and arrange offerings on portable altars for Ea and Marduk. The beneficiary raises the image of the wildcat while the oral rite is spoken aloud by either the

intercessor or the beneficiary.[7] Afterward the image is laid on the ground while the intercessor purifies the beneficiary with a censor, torch, and holy water. Kneeling, the beneficiary is to "speak what is on his mind"—a second oral rite but one without prescribed wording. The intercessor then throws the wildcat model into the river. The beneficiary is to go directly home, avoiding the path used in arriving. The instructions end with the statement "then the misfortune will not approach him so long as he lives." The following transcription of the oral rite is adapted from the collated versions in Maul (1994, 333–4):

15 [d]*É-a u* dAMAR.UTU DINGIR.MEŠ *re-em-n*[*u*ʔ]*i*
16 [*pa*]-*ṭi-ru ka-s*[*e*]-*e* [*za-qí-p*]*u en-ši*
17 [*n*]*a-i-m*[*u*] ˹*a-me-lu-ti*
18 [din]gir *É-a u* drAMAR.UTU *ina* u_4*-me an-né-e*
19 [*in*]*a*ˡ *di-ni-ia i-zi-za-nim-ma*
20 [*d*]*i-ni di-na* EŠ.BAR-*a-a pu-ur-sa*
21 [Ḫ]UL *mu-ra-še-e an-né-e*
22 [*ša i*]*na* É.*MU i-bak-ku-u i-dam-mu-mu*
23 [*ur-n*]*a u mu-šá* MUD-*ni u lu-ú ḫi-ṭi-t*[*i*]
24 [*šá* DINGIR].[MU ˹*u*˺ ˹*lu*˺-˹*ú*˺ *ḫi-ṭi*]-*tú šá* dXV.MU
25 [d*É-a u* d]˹AMAR˺.˹UTU˺ DINGIR.MEŠ *šu-pu-ti*
26 [*lumun idāti* G]ISKIM.MEŠ ḪUL.MEŠ
27 [*šá ina bitīya* GÁL(.MEŠ)]-˹*a šu-ti-qa-an-ni-ma*
28 [*a-a* T]E-*a a-a* KU.NU
r. 1 [*ai isniqa ai*] KUR-*an-ni*
r. 2 [*libir nāra li-ba*]*l-kit* KUR-*a*
r. 3 [*lissi šār* (1.)DANNA] *ina* SU.MU
r. 4 [*kima qutri li-te*]*l-li* AN-*e*
r. 5 [*kima bīni* ZI-*ḫ*]*i ana* KI-*šú a-a* GUR

In the translation, I identify "ordinary" and "hybrid" individual speech acts:

[7] Because the instruction appears in logographs the speaker is unclear. Most such oral rites were probably spoken first by the intercessor, then repeated by the beneficiary (Mayer 1976, 63–5; Maul 1994, 67–8, 86).

Text	Speech
15 Ea and Marduk, compassionate gods 16 who free the bound, who stand the weak upright, 17 who love humanity— 18 Ea and Marduk, on this day 19 Stand beside me in my trial!	Ordinary
20 Judge my case, decide my verdict!	Ordinary
21 The evil of this wildcat 22 which wails (and) whines in my house 23a day and night, frightens me.	Ordinary
23b Whether (due to) an offense 24 against my god or an offense against my goddess, 25 Ea and Marduk, resplendent gods, 26 the evil of signs (and) evil portents 27 which exist in my house, make (it) pass me by!	Ordinary
28 May (the evil) not approach, may it not come near r.1 May it not press upon (me), may it not reach me!	Hybrid
r.2a May it cross the river!	Hybrid
r.2b May it go over the mountain!	Hybrid
r.3 May it be 3600 miles away from my person!	Hybrid
r.4 Like smoke may it climb to heaven!	Hybrid
r.5 Like an uprooted tamarisk may it not return to its place!	Hybrid

Lines 15–27 contain ordinary speech acts which present the beneficiary's case in juridical terms analogous to those which might be used for supplicating human authorities. Epithets of praise were conventional in heralding Neo-Assyrian kings (Hoskisson and Boswell 2004, 70). Nearly all the longer *namburbû* begin with similar openings using ordinary language. According to Stefan Maul, the purpose of these openings is to persuade the gods to reverse their decree, a necessary prelude to the "older level of practice" of magical purification in the remainder of the ritual (Maul 1994, 60 and 72). Baruch Levine (2000, 162) offers a general description of ancient Near Eastern magic in which the magician must first attract

the gods' attention through sacrifice, and then present the petition, before the gods would authorize magical acts.

In the second part, lines 28-r.5, all speech acts are "hybrid" (having both causative and ordinary illocutionary force). From the perspective of ordinary speech, lines 28-r.5 consists of a string of petitions. Although the use of repetition and vibrant imagery makes these petitions more colorful than those in lines 19–20, they nonetheless convey meaning as supplications to the invoked gods. From another perspective, however, these lines carry causative illocutionary force. Lines r.4-r.5 correspond to what has been described as "persuasive analogies" (Tambiah 1973), "effective similes" (Hillers 1984), *similia similibus* with an appended "wish formula" expressed in the third person optative (Faraone 1991), or simply "analogies" (Wright 1993). These speech acts comprise a comparison between two elements and an expressed desire that an attribute be transferred from one element to the other. Persuasive analogies are intended to create the desired transformation through magic. For example, the persuasive analogy in r.4 is meant to transfer an attribute (the act of moving away) from one element (smoke) to another (the evil). The speech acts in lines 28-r. 3 are not part of persuasive analogies in this text, but they form the final lines of persuasive analogies in other *namburbû*.[8] We can reasonably assume that here the words bear the same illocutionary force despite the absence of the analogies themselves, especially since they directly precede the persuasive analogies in r.4-r.5.

As hybrids, the speech acts in lines 28-r.5 have two kinds of illocutionary force: ordinary and causative. In effect, the speech acts are meant to directly and magically remove the evil or impurity even as they plead the gods to remove it. The speaker's use of causative speech is disguised since the words double as appeals to the gods. Such ambiguous agency is appropriate for magic, whose essential attribute is mysterious causality.

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[8] For example, KAR 64 lines 47–49 read, "Just as this image cannot return to its place, may its evil not approach! May it not come near! May it not press upon me! May it not reach me!"

APOTROPAIC INTERCESSION IN BRONZE AGE ANATOLIA: TWO RITUAL TEXTS

Apotropaic intercessory texts from Anatolia are rare compared with the plethora of Neo-Assyrian texts. Because the best-known of these, the substitute king rituals, show significant Mesopotamian influence, I chose two others coming from two different regions in Anatolia. CTH 398 (KBo 4.2), from the western region of Azarwa, wards off the ill effects on the king and queen foretold by an indigenous Anatolian divinatory practice, bird observation (Beal 2002). CTH 476 (KBo 5.1), from Kizzuwatna in the south, averts the evil portended to a pregnant woman—also probably royal—by a broken birth stool (Mouton 2008, 22–3 and 38–9). The two differ dramatically in their use of speech: the first uses primarily hybrid or causative language, while the second uses only ordinary speech acts.

CTH 398, the Ritual of Ḫuwarlu

The text of this ritual follows a model used since the early Hittite Empire (Taracha 2009, 152). After the statement of purpose (it is to be performed when there are "terrifying birds," that is, a disastrous augury result) comes a list of preparatory ritual acts, including the manufacture of figurines. No invocation appears in the expected opening position.[9] Instead, a list of ritual supplies ends with directions to roast a variety of seeds, followed by the first oral rite, directing low-level divine entities ("staff-bearers from heaven") to push out the "evil sign" or "terrifying birds," which is in turn followed by a persuasive analogy. Fourteen more oral rites follow, interspersed with manual rites. The well-preserved portions of the text address the prevention, removal, and disposal of impurity from the beneficiaries' bodies and palace. Included are instructions for two more acts of augury to determine the best location for disposal and the best timing for a sacrifice. The broken

[9] Invocation rites sometimes appeared on separate tablets but none has been linked to this text. Bawanypeck (2005, 152) mentions calling, attracting, and sacrificing to the gods as the step following the list of ritual supplies among the augur ritual texts in general. She does not address the lack of an opening invocation in this particular text.

ending includes sacrifices and petitions for the royal family's well-being addressed to various gods and further purification of the beneficiaries and intercessors. Because of the ritual's length I present the first oral rite only, although I consider all but the final fragmentary oral rites in my analysis.

First Oral Rite in the Ritual of Ḫuwarlu (Bawanypeck 2005, 22 and 24):

13 *nu* ^{LÚ}MUŠEN.DÙ ^{MUNUS}ŠU.GI-ya *ki-iš-ša-an me-mi-ya-an-zi*
14 *ka-a-ša-wa-an-na-aš* ⌜*pe*⌝*-i-e-er* DINGIR^{MEŠ} *ne-pí-ša-az* LÚ^{MEŠ} ^{GIŠ}GIDRU
15 *it-tén-wa-kán IŠ-TU* É.GAL^{LIM} *kal-la-ar* INIM-*tar pa-ra-a šu-u-wa-at-tén*
16 *nu-wa i-it-tén* ⌜*ḫa-tu*⌝*-ga* ⌜*uš* MUŠEN$^{ḪI.A}$ *ki* ⌜*iš* ⌜*ta*⌝*-nu-ut-te-en*
17 *nu-kán ke-e* NUMEN$^{[ḪI.]⌜A⌝}$ *ma-aḫ-ḫa-an ki-iš-ta-ri kal-la-a-ra-ya>ra-ya<-kán*
18 *ud-da-a-ar ḫa-tu-ga-ú-ša* MUŠEN$^{ḪI.A}$ *QA-TAM-MA ki-iš-ta-ru*
(CTH 398 i 14-18)

Translation:

Text	Speech
14 The gods have now sent us the staff-bearers from heaven.	Ordinary
15 Go! Push the sinister sign from the palace!	Causative
16 Go! Eradicate the terrifying birds!	Causative
17 Just as these seeds are eradicated, 18 so let the sinister signs and the terrifying birds also be eradicated.	Hybrid

Although CTH 398 contains ordinary, causative, and hybrid speech acts, most of those in the text's extant portions are causative or hybrid. In the undamaged portion, the few ordinary speech acts serve mainly to introduce unseen ritual participants, as in line 14 above, or to explain the function of ritual materials. Reconstructions of the damaged ending suggest ordinary speech acts containing invocations and petitions (Bawanypeck 2005, 175). Speech acts that I classify as causative are generally commands addressed to low-level divine entities such as the heavenly staff-bearers in line 14 or *Kultmittel* (ritual tools such as a tallow dog rendered animate during the ritual). Hybrid speech acts include several persuasive analogies. The persuasive analogy formula is

exemplified in lines 17–18 above. Two of the persuasive analogies addressed to the model dog end with a second-person imperative and are classed as causatives. Although no gods are explicitly invoked in the early parts of the ritual, their presence can be inferred from two references to the gods' help in sending the staff-bearers (in CTH 398 i 14 and later in the ritual) and several references to the gods in the broken final section, including a clear invitation to a god to drink.

An Oral Rite from the Ritual of Papanikri (CTH 476)

The ritual in CTH 476, attributed to an "incantation-priest" named Papanikri, is intended to avert the evil predicted by a damaged birth stool. The broken birth stool signals the woman's impurity, a result of divine anger at human offense (Mouton 2008, 67). Like the Ritual of Ḫuwarlu, the main purpose of this ritual is to eliminate the impurity signaled by the unfavorable omen and reconcile the beneficiary with the gods. The oral rite I analyze is the longest of four, two of which consist of the single word "health!" (CTH 476 iii 47 and iv 26). The other consists of an instruction given by the *patili*-priest to the woman to enquire of the gods concerning the omen; if one of them is angry at her she is to present him with an offering (CTH 476 i 15-17). Two sets of sheep and birds are then offered to the gods and the priest recites:

41 *ma-a-an-wa* AMA-*KA na-aš-ma A-BU-KA ap-pé-ez-zi-az*
42 *ku-it-ki wa-aš-ta-nu-wa-an ḫar-kán-zi na-aš-ma-wa zi-ik*
43 *ka-a pa-ra-a ḫa-an-da-an-ni na-aš-ma za-aš-ḫi-it ku-it-ki*
44 *wa-aš-ta-nu-wa-an ḫar-ta nu ḫar-na-a-uš ḫu-u-ni-ik-ta-at*
45 GIŠGAGḪLA *-ma-wa du-wa-ar-na-ad-da-at ki-nu-na-wa*
46 *ka-a-ša* DINGIR-*LUM 2 ta-a-an šar-ni-ik-ta*
47 *nu BE-EL* SÍSKUR *pár-ku-iš nam-ma e-eš-du* (CTH 476 i 41-7).[10]

[10] The transcription is adapted from Feder (2010, 103) with three changes from Strauss (2006, 288): GIŠGAGḪLA in line 45, DINGIR-*LUM* in line 46, and *ta-a-an* in line 46.

Translation:

Text	Speech
41–46 If your mother or father have sinned *of late*, or you have just committed some sin as a consequence of divine intervention or through a dream, and the birth stool was damaged or the pegs were broken, O divinity, she has for her part made compensation[11] two times.	Ordinary
47 Let the ritual patron be pure again! [12]	Ordinary

Both speech acts in this oral rite are ordinary. They make use of legalistic "pleading," known in both religious and juridical contexts as *arkuwar,* cognate to the Latin *argumentum* (Singer 2002, 2–3; Taracha 2009, 142–4). The first speech act provides a legal rationale for the god to grant the petition in the second. The ritual practitioner explains to the deity that the beneficiary has already made compensation for her own or her parents' sins—not just once but twice (presumably the two sets of animals just sacrificed). Financial compensation as a means of "atoning" for sin or offense was common to both jurisprudence and religion.

Like most oral rites in the previous ritual, this speech begins with preparatory information, and ends by stating the rite's desired outcome. Yet, neither the agency nor the causality is mysterious: a clear-cut financial transaction has occurred and is put forward as a reason for the god to forgive. Other manual rites in the ritual

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[11] Feder (2010, 103) translates "atonement" rather than "compensation" but CHD (*Š* 2:286) renders *šarni(n)k* as "to compensate, make/pay compensation for, replace, make restitution for, make up for, make good (claims)." Mouton (2008, 103) uses the French verb "*payer*".

[12] Feder (2010, 103) places line 47 outside the quotation: "Then the ritual patron shall be pure again." I follow Strauss and Mouton in understanding it to be part of the recitation itself. The use of the 3rd-person imperative in this position follows the pattern established in the Ritual of Ḫuwarlu: "(Deshalb) möge der Ritualmandant wieder frei (von Unreinheit) sein!" (Strauss 2006, 297). In English: "(Therefore) let the ritual beneficiary be once more free (from impurity)!" See also Mouton (2008, 103): "que la commanditaire du rituel soit de nouveau pure!"

involve magic, but the speech in the central oral rite manifests ordinary illocutionary force, in keeping with the theology of the time and region (Taracha 2009, 142).

BIBLICAL MATERIAL

As noted earlier, biblical apotropaic intercession containing direct discourse appears only in narratives. Clearly the concept of warding off divinely threatened doom was familiar to biblical writers. Nonetheless, the relationship of these narratives to actual practice is unknown. Some narrative portrayals of apotropaic intercession might have been interpretations or purported mythic precursors of actual practices. In general, however, these texts lack explicit ritual elements or gestures other than prostration, and thus better fit Moshe Greenberg's category of "prose prayer."

The speech acts in all biblical apotropaic intercession are entirely ordinary. Here I give two examples. The first is Moses' appeal to YHWH in Exod. 32:11b–13.

Exodus	Text	Speech
32:11b	Why, O YHWH, does your anger burn against your people whom you brought out from the land of Egypt with great strength and with mighty power?	Ordinary
32:12a	Why should Egypt say, it was with evil in mind that you brought them out, in order to kill them in the mountains, and to annihilate them from the face of the earth?	Ordinary
32:12b	Turn away from your burning anger and relent from the evil meant for your people.	Ordinary
32:13	Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you made an oath, saying to them, I will multiply your progeny like the stars of heaven, and all this land of which I spoke, I will give to your progeny and they will inherit it forever.	Ordinary

Moses' appeal uses ordinary speech only, relying on rhetoric to make his case. He asks that YHWH not fulfill his threat to destroy the Israelites based on two primary reasons. First, such an act would convince the Egyptians that YHWH had never meant to save the Israelites, thereby shaming YHWH before the neighbors and rendering his miracles useless. Second, YHWH had made an oath to the patriarchs to bring their descendants into the land. In addition, by referring twice to "your people" and naming the patriarchs, Moses appeals to YHWH's emotional attachment toward his intended victims.

We see wholly ordinary speech in the second example as well. Amos responds to a vision of locusts consuming the crops:

Amos	Text	Speech
7:2bα	My Lord YHWH, please forgive!	Ordinary
7:2bβ	Who will stand for Jacob?	Ordinary
7:2bγ	He is so small!	Ordinary

Again, the intercessor combines a petition with reasons for YHWH to relent, based on an appeal to emotions: Israel's small size and its lack of another protector. There is nothing causative about these statements. Rather, they attempt to persuade the deity to revoke his planned punishment through rhetoric.

In their use of solely ordinary speech, these two examples are characteristic of apotropaic intercession in the Hebrew Bible.[13] Yet the biblical writers were certainly aware of causative speech. For example, Balaam uses causative language in blessing the Israelites whom he was intended to curse (Num. 23:7–10), and Esau's lost blessing is more than a social gesture. Blessings and curses aside,

[13] All twelve examples which contain direct discourse to the deity use only ordinary speech. These include Abraham's dialogue with YHWH about Sodom in Gen. 18:23b–32a; Moses' intercessions on behalf of the Israelites in Exod. 32:11b–13, 31b–32, and Deut. 9:26–29 (all addressing the sin of the Golden Calf), and Num. 14:13b–19 (after the episode of the spies); Moses and Aaron's intercession after Korah's rebellion in Num. 16:22; the brief appeals in Ezek. 9:8b, 11:13b and Amos 7:2, 5; and David's intercessory prayer after the census in 2 Sam. 24:17 and 1 Chron. 21:17.

however, the writers of the Hebrew Bible rarely portrayed the use of causative speech by Israelites. Moses and Aaron use actions only in producing the plagues, and the one time that Moses combines words and actions in producing a miracle (Num. 20:9–11) YHWH penalizes him severely (Milgrom 1983). In contexts in which surrounding societies often used causative language—such as purification rites—biblical presentations lack prescribed speech altogether (for example, in the rituals in Leviticus 4, 5, 7, 12—16). In fact, outside of the mandated confessions in Lev. 5:5 and Lev. 16:21, these rituals completely lack any references to speech. Only in the cases of Elijah and Elisha do we see regular use of causative direct discourse other than blessings and curses. In these cases it is not so much the wording that provides the connection with divine power, but the speakers themselves, who are evidently authorized to enact miracles through words and deeds. The wording of Josh. 10:12–14 makes it clear that the overall dearth of causative human speech in the Hebrew Bible is no coincidence. In this narrative, Joshua utters causative language which the Lord chooses to heed, thereby keeping the sun and moon in the sky until the Israelites' enemy is routed by YHWH's hailstones. The narrator comments that only in this single instance did YHWH obey (לִשְׁמֹעַ בְּקוֹל) human speech.[14]

CONCLUSIONS

Apotropaic intercession represents human attempts to counter divine will. Unlike two of the three ANE ritual texts I presented, biblical examples of apotropaic intercession use only ordinary speech. The biblical writers depict YHWH's chosen intercessors as

[14] "On that occasion, when the LORD routed the Amorites before the Israelites, Joshua addressed the LORD; he said in the presence of the Israelites: 'Stand still, O sun, at Gibeon, O moon, in the Valley of Aijalon!' [13]And the sun stood still And the moon halted, While a nation wreaked judgment on its foes—as is written in the Book of Jashar. Thus the sun halted in midheaven, and did not press on to set, for a whole day; [14]for the LORD fought for Israel. Neither before nor since has there ever been such a day, when the LORD acted on words spoken by a man" (Josh. 10:12–14, NJPS).

attempting to ward off divine threats of doom by means of persuasion alone. In contrast, in the Ritual of Ḫuwarlu and the wildcat *namburbi*, speakers use a combination of types of speech, including hybrid and causative forms. Reliance on solely ordinary speech in biblical accounts of apotropaic intercession is not merely a matter of the genre of the texts, but reflects the theology of the biblical writers. I base my claim on the following points.

First, there is no absolute link between genre and speech type. Like the biblical apotropaic intercessory narratives, the Ritual of Papanikri contains only ordinary speech. This ritual speech uses *arkuwar*, argumentation, presenting an understanding of divine-human relations as analogous to those in a court of law.

Second, the biblical writers shy away from direct discourse in contexts in which we might expect causative speech. For example, much of the causative speech in the ritual texts I study is meant to remove impurity. While Leviticus contains an abundance of ritual texts with this goal, they lack *any* prescribed oral rites. Moreover, none of Moses' or Aaron's miraculous deeds uses prescribed speech.

Third, Josh. 10:12–14 concludes clear causative language with a claim that only in this instance did YHWH obey human speech, indicating the narrator's fear that causative language constrains the deity. In this story, YHWH's will and Joshua's are in agreement: both seek the enemy's defeat. Given that apotropaic intercession seeks to overturn divine will, the use of causative language in such appeals would seem to pose an even greater theological threat.

Ultimately, the task in apotropaic intercession is twofold: not only to counter the divine will, but to do so in ways that affirm the ultimate supremacy of the gods. Different texts apply different strategies to achieve this dual goal, reflecting the theology of their writers. All of the texts surveyed use some ordinary language in attempts to persuade the gods to eliminate the threat or impurity. The texts using hybrid or causative speech precede it with ordinary speech petitioning or acknowledging divine aid. The use of hybrid speech acts further masks human agency. Finally, specific Mesopotamian traditions ascribe to the gods the rituals themselves. The biblical writers show a more extreme desire to portray the deity as distinct from humanity by depicting him as the sole authorized user of causative speech (barring a few exceptions). Yet, in the end all of the texts studied represent variations of the same

dynamic. In different ways, all show humanity as unable to counter the divine will without the aid of the gods themselves.