VOLUME IIa.

SYSTEMATIC PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

ON GOD: ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

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WILEY Blackwell

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To Jan, who inspired this monumental project and sustained me throughout.

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Analytic Contents

Preface to Volume IIa

I have little to add to my general Preface affixed to vol. I. Given the size of the locus *De Deo*, which constitutes the heart of Christian theology, it seemed best to commence a new volume with this topic. Indeed, the subject proved to be so large in scope that, in order to keep the volumes in this series to approximately similar lengths, it was decided to break this volume into two parts. Accordingly, in vol. IIa I treat the attributes of God or, in philosophical parlance, the coherence of theism. This field has been my preoccupation since completing my doctoral work, yielding extensive studies of the coherence of divine omniscience, eternity, and aseity. Here I discuss nine of the central attributes of God, examining both their biblical basis and their most plausible philosophical articulation. Although I consider myself to stand in the tradition of classical theism, it will become obvious that I do not embrace strong accounts of divine simplicity, immutability, or impassibility.

In the Preface to vol. I I asked whether there were any philosophical distinctives that characterize this systematic philosophical theology. The present volume prompts me to ask a similar question about theological distinctives. Already in vol. I my Molinist convictions began to surface, playing the key role in articulating a plausible doctrine of verbal, plenary, confluent biblical inspiration. The present volume permits me to explain more fully the doctrine of divine middle knowledge, which is in my opinion one of

the most fruitful theological concepts ever conceived. Molinism plays such a major part in my understanding of Christian doctrine that I think these volumes deserve to be described as a Molinist systematic theology, the first such that I am aware of in centuries.

In vol. IIb we turn from generic theism to the subject of the Trinity. I am convinced that the New Testament teaches a primitive doctrine of the Trinity, according to which (i) there is exactly one God, and (ii) there are exactly three persons – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – who are properly called God. I hope to show that such a doctrine is not only logically coherent but can also be plausibly modeled along Social Trinitarian lines as tri-personal monotheism.

In between the discussion of the coherence of theism and the discussion of Trinitarian theism is the logical place for an Excursus on Natural Theology. Although, as I explained in the Prolegomena to these volumes, I do not consider natural theology to belong inherently to systematic theology, since the systematician does not bear the burden of proving his scripturally based doctrinal claims, nonetheless natural theology has historically been a part of some systematic theologies, and so the inclusion of such an Excursus seems altogether appropriate, given my great interest in the field. Having already defended the proper basicality of theistic belief in the locus *De fide*, I here offer six arguments for the existence of God that I find convincing, including the Leibnizian argument from contingency, the *kalām* cosmological argument, the argument from the uncanny applicability of mathematics to physical phenomena, the teleological argument from the fine-tuning of the universe for embodied, conscious agents, the moral argument from the objectivity of moral values and duties, and the ontological argument from the metaphysical possibility of a maximally great being. Also included in this Excursus is a response to the principal atheistic counter-arguments, particularly the so-called problem of evil and suffering.

In our Prolegomena I explained that the subject matter of Christian systematic theology is God and anything else in relation to God. Having laid in this volume the theistic foundations, we may move in vol. III to *De creatione*, other things in relation to God.

I wish to thank once again my research assistant Timothy Bayless for his hard work in compiling the indices and bibliography and helping to put the typescript into Wiley-Blackwell's house style.

Although I draw in this volume from previous publications, I have in every case updated and expanded my earlier discussion. Previous publications relevant to vol. II include: *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez,* Studies in Intellectual

History 7 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988); *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom: The Coherence of Theism I: Omniscience,* Studies in Intellectual History 19 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991); *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987; *God, Time and Eternity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001); *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001); *Reasonable Faith,* 3rd ed. rev. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); "The *Kalam* Cosmological Argument," with James Sinclair in *The Blackwell Companion to Natural Theology*, ed. Wm. L. Craig and J. P. Moreland (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 101–201; "Divine Eternity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology*, ed. Thomas Flint and Michael Rea (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 145–66; *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); *God and Abstract Objects: The Coherence of Theism III: Aseity* (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 2017); *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview*, with J. P. Moreland, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017); *A Debate on God and Morality: What Is the Best Account of Objective Moral Values and Duties?* with Erik J. Wielenberg, ed. A. Johnson (London: Routledge, 2020); "The Argument from the Applicability of Mathematics," in *Contemporary Arguments in Natural Theology: God and Rational Belief*, ed. C. Ruloff and P. Horban (London: Bloomsbury, 2021), pp. 195–215.

Locus III

De Deo

PART I: *ATTRIBUTA DEI*

1
Introduction

The existence and nature of God are central concerns of Christian theology. While the systematic theologian may not engage in natural theology but may simply assume on the basis of scriptural teaching that the God of the Bible exists, he cannot be indifferent to the question of the nature or attributes of the biblical God, since God's nature is determinative for the entire Christian theological system. Unfortunately, in the words of Lutheran theologian Robert Preus, "The doctrine of God is the most difficult *locus* in Christian dogmatics."[1] Does God exist necessarily or contingently? Is he absolutely simple or complex? Is he timeless or omnitemporal? Does he transcend space or fill space? Does his almighty power imply the ability to do the logically impossible or are there limits to his power? Systematic theologians have often assumed uncritically traditional answers to these sorts of questions, answers that have been sharply challenged in modern times. During the late twentieth century the concept of God became fertile ground for anti-theistic philosophical arguments. The difficulty with theism, it was often said, is not merely that there are no

[1] Robert D. Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1970), 2:53.

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good arguments for the existence of God, but, more fundamentally, that the concept of God is incoherent.[2]

It is here that the contribution of contemporary Christian philosophers to systematic theology has been most pronounced and helpful. The anti-theistic critique evoked a prodigious literature devoted to the philosophical analysis of the concept of God.[3] As a result, one of the principal concerns of contemporary philosophy of religion has been the coherence of theism.

Two controls have tended to guide this inquiry into the divine nature: Scripture and so-called perfect being theology. For thinkers in the Judeo-Christian tradition, God's self-revelation in Scripture is obviously paramount in understanding what God is like. Still, while Scripture is our supreme authority in formulating a doctrine of God, so that doctrines contrary to biblical teaching are theologically unacceptable, contemporary thinkers have come to appreciate that the doctrine of God is underdetermined by the biblical data. The biblical authors were not philosophical theologians but in many cases storytellers whose accounts of man's relationship with God bear all the marks of the storyteller's art, being told from a human perspective without reflection upon philosophical considerations. The biblical theologian will therefore search in vain for clear answers to many philosophical questions concerning the divine attributes. Answers taken for granted by traditional dogmaticians need to be brought anew before the bar of Scripture and their biblical support and consonance re-examined.

In addition, St. Anselm's conception of God as a being than which a greater cannot be conceived (*aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari possit*)[4] or

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[2] Thus, an obviously unsympathetic critic like Kai Nielsen characterizes fellow atheists "who believe 'There is a God' is simply false" as "Neanderthal atheists," whereas atheists like himself "who reject the very concept of God as unintelligible" are "non-Neanderthal atheists" (Kai Nielsen, "A Sceptic's Reply," in *Faith and the Philosophers,* ed. John Hick [London: Macmillan, 1964], 232).

[3] See William J. Wainwright, *Philosophy of Religion: An Annotated Bibliography of Twentieth-Century Writings in English* (New York: Garland, 1978). Reference works in philosophy of religion thus almost always include a sizable section on the various attributes of God, for example, Chad Meister and Paul Copan, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion,* Routledge Philosophy Companions (London: Routledge, 2007), pt. 4; Paul Copan and Chad Meister, eds. *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pt. 3; Thomas P. Flint and Michael C. Rea, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pt. 2; Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn, eds., *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed., Blackwell Companions to Philosophy 8 (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pt. 4; Charles Taliaferro and Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pt. 1; Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021). The same is true of anthologies in philosophy of religion.

[4] In his *Proslogion* 2 Anselm thus addresses God: "And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived." Cf. *Proslogion* 3: "this being thou art, O Lord, our God." Hoffman and Rosenkrantz explain, "Another way of putting the matter replaces the partly psychological term 'can be conceived' with the wholly modal term 'is possible,' resulting in a definition which states that God is a being than which nothing greater is *possible*. Such a revision is advantageous in that the resulting definition is less psychological, and therefore, more objective" (Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz, "Divine Attributes" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0106). Anselm thought that "if a mind could conceive of a being better than thee, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd" (*Proslogion* III). This does not seem to be a very good reason for understanding God to be such a being, since one can conceive of things greater than oneself, whether existent or non-existent. It would be better to stipulate that by "God" one means the being than which a greater cannot be conceived, so that it impossible to conceive of something greater than God. Intuitively, this is what believers mean by "God."

most perfect being (*ens perfectissimum*) has guided philosophical speculation on the raw data of Scripture, so that God's biblical attributes are to be conceived in ways that would serve to exalt God's greatness.[5] The biblical concept of God's being almighty, for example, is thus to be construed as maximally as possible. John Hick aptly credits Anselm for bringing the Christian doctrine of God to full flower:

> Perhaps the most valuable feature of Anselm's argument is its formulation of the Christian concept of God. Augustine (*De Libero Arbitrio* II, 6, 14) had used the definition of God as one 'than whom there is nothing superior.' . . . Anselm, however, does not define God as the most perfect being that there is but as a being than whom no more perfect is even conceivable. This represents the final development of the monotheistic conception. God is the most adequate conceivable object of worship; there is no possibility of another reality beyond him to which he is inferior or subordinate and which would thus be an even more worthy recipient of man's devotion. Thus metaphysical ultimacy and moral ultimacy coincide; one cannot ask of the most perfect conceivable being. . . whether men ought to worship him. Here the religious exigencies that move from polytheism through henotheism to ethical monotheism reach their logical terminus. And the credit belongs to Anselm for having first formulated this central core of the ultimate concept of deity.[6]

Unfortunately, the conception of God as a perfect being is not without its ambiguity. Nagasawa takes God to be "the greatest metaphysically possible being," a view he calls the perfect being thesis.[7] Nagasawa holds that the perfect being thesis need not be taken to entail that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent, since those properties are a matter of philosophical dispute, but simply that God has "the maximal consistent set of knowledge, power, and benevolence."[8] He thinks that there are neither biblical grounds nor compelling philosophical arguments for the entailment of the omni-attributes "in a philosophically strict sense." That seems to me a dubious stratagem for perfect being theology, since the

[5] Of Anselm's concept, Brian Leftow comments, "Talk of God as a perfect being is certainly appropriate theologically, and perfect being theology has been the main tool to give content to the concept of God philosophically almost as long as there has been philosophical theology" (Brian Leftow, "The Ontological Argument," in *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. William J. Wainwright [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 110). Yujin Nagasawa observes that "Perfect being theism is widely accepted among Judeo-Christian-Islamic theists today. It is no exaggeration to say that nearly all the central debates over the existence and nature of God in the philosophy of religion rely on this form of theism" (Yujin Nagasawa, *Maximal God: A New Defence of Perfect Being Theism* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017], 2; cf. 7).

[6] John Hick, "Ontological Argument for the Existence of God," in *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2nd ed., ed. Donald M. Borchert (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006), 7:15–20. Nagasawa traces the Anselmian concept of God all the way back to Plato (*Maximal God,* 15–24).

[7] Nagasawa, 9.

[8] Nagasawa, 92.

maximal, consistent set of attributes could describe a limited and finite God. Nagasawa's construal seems to rule out the incoherence of theism by definition.

By contrast, Michael Almeida takes as "a defining feature of perfect being theology" the inference from the proposition that God is a perfect being to the conclusion that God has every property that it is better to exemplify than not.[9] Unfortunately, it will not always be clear which properties it is absolutely better to have than to lack. My own understanding and utilization of perfect being theology is more informative, being what Almeida calls a posteriori Anselmianism, which extrapolates divine attributes from Scripture as greatly as possible.[10]

Since the concept of God is underdetermined by the biblical data and since what constitutes a "great-making" property is to some degree debatable, philosophers working within the Judeo-Christian tradition enjoy considerable latitude in formulating a philosophically coherent and biblically faithful doctrine of God. Philosophical theists have thus found that anti-theistic critiques of certain conceptions of God can actually be quite helpful in framing a more adequate conception. Thus, far from undermining theism, the anti-theistic critiques have served mainly to reveal how rich and interesting the concept of God is, thereby refining and strengthening theistic belief.

In what follows we shall explore some of the most important attributes traditionally ascribed to God.

[9] Michael J. Almeida, "Perfect Being Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2021), https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119009924.eopr0295.

[10] Observing that it is hard to deduce divine attributes from the claim that God is a perfect being, Michael Rea suggests, "Perhaps instead. . . we should think that the claim that God is perfect merely imposes constraints on our theorizing about the divine attributes; or perhaps we should think. . . that our grasp of perfection simply helps us to flesh out our understanding of divine attributes that we arrive at via special revelation or some other route" (Michael C. Rea "Introduction," in *Essays in Analytic Theology,* Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology, vol. 1, by Michael C. Rea [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021], 11).

2
Incorporeality

Fundamental to Christian theology is the conviction that God is an incorporeal being. Despite the etymology, by "divine incorporeality" we do not mean that God is without a body – indeed, according to the Christian doctrine of the incarnation, God the Son does have a human body since the moment of his assumption of a complete human nature in Mary's virginal conception of Jesus – but rather that God is an immaterial being. Just as the human soul, whether embodied or disembodied, is taken by anthropological dualists to be immaterial, so God, whether bodiless or incarnate, is an immaterial substance distinct from the world.

2.1 Biblical Data Concerning Divine Incorporeality

2.1.1 Divine Creation

Among the most important scriptural evidences for God's immateriality are passages affirming God's creation of the physical world, indeed, of everything distinct from himself. The Bible opens with the majestic words: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1.1). Although we shall have much more to say about this passage in our locus *De creatione*, we may note in passing that most scholars today recognize this statement to be an independent clause, not a subordinate clause. Moreover, v. 1 is arguably not simply a title for the creation story, since it

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is connected to v. 2 by *waw* (and) and, if taken as a title, would be inaccurate, since the ensuing account does not, in fact, describe the creation of the earth (v. 2). The author of the opening chapter of Genesis thereby differentiated his viewpoint from that of the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian creation myths. For the author of Genesis 1, no pre-existent material seems to be assumed – in the beginning there is only God, who is said simply to "create" "the heavens and the earth," a Hebrew merism for the totality of the world or, more simply, the universe. Neither is the world said to have been created out of the divine substance, as in some Ancient Near Eastern myths.

The conception of God in Genesis 1 is thus stunningly different from anything else in the Ancient Near East. The dominant and distinguishing tenet of Hebrew thought, state Henri Frankfort and H. A. Frankfort, is the absolute transcendence of God.[1] Nahum Sarna encapsulates the teaching of the biblical creation narrative thus: "Its quintessential teaching is that the universe is wholly the purposeful product of divine intelligence, that is, of the one self-sufficient, self-existing God, who is a transcendent Being outside of nature and who is sovereign over space and time."[2] The author of Genesis 1 thus gives us to understand that God is independent of and the Creator of the material realm, thereby implying that he is not a material object.

In the New Testament (NT) the prologue of John's Gospel underlines the teaching of the Genesis creation story. The author begins, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made" (Jn 1.1–3). Harking back to Gen 1.1, the author affirms that in the very beginning all that exists is God and his Word (*logos*). Then everything else comes into existence through God's Word. The verb *ginomai* (v. 3) has the meaning "to be created" or "to come into being." Creation comes to the fore by John's indicating the agent who was responsible for all things' coming into being. John speaks of God's Word as the one "through whom" (*di' autou*) all things came into being. So at the very beginning is God and his Word, and then everything else comes into being through the creatorial power of God's Word.

By the time of the NT classical Platonism had evolved into so-called Middle Platonism, and Hellenistic Judaism bears its imprint. The doctrine of the

[1] H. Frankfort and H. A. Frankfort, "The Emancipation of Thought from Myth," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East*, by Henri Frankfort et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 367.

[2] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 3–4; cf. xii.

divine creative Logos found in John's prologue was widespread in Middle Platonism, being attested as early as Antiochus of Ascalon (125–68 B.C.) and Eudorus (first century B.C.), two of the earliest Middle Platonists. Hellenistic Jews, notably Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.–A.D. 50), adapted the Logos doctrine to Jewish monotheism. The similarities between Philo and John's doctrines of the Logos are so numerous and so close that most Johannine scholars, while not willing to affirm John's direct dependence on Philo, do recognize that the author of the prologue of John's Gospel shares with Philo a common intellectual tradition of a Middle Platonic interpretation of Genesis 1.[3]

Interested as he is in the incarnation of the divine Logos, John does not pause to reflect on the state of the Logos "in the beginning," causally prior to creation. But this pre-creation state does feature prominently in Philo's doctrine of the Logos. According to David Runia, a cornerstone of Middle Platonism was the division of reality into the intelligible and the sensible realms.[4] The former realm is grasped by the intellect, while the latter is perceived by the senses. The sensible realm comprised primarily physical objects, while the intelligible realm included what we would today call abstract objects. For Middle Platonists, as for Plato, the intelligible world served as a model for the creation of the sensible world. As a Jewish monotheist, Philo thinks that this intelligible world exists as the contents of the divine mind.

This view was not original to Philo, however. The interpretation of the Platonic Ideas as thoughts in the mind of God was characteristic of Middle Platonism and became widespread throughout the ancient world.[5] For example, Nicomachus of Gerasa (ca. A.D. 60–120), held that of the four subjects of the classical quadrivium,

> arithmetic . . . existed before all the others in the mind of the creating God like some universal and exemplary plan, relying upon which as a design

[3] So Jutta Leonhardt-Balzer, "Der Logos und die Schöpfung: Streiflichter bei Philo (Op 20–25) und im Johannesprolog (Joh 1, 1–18)" in *Kontexte des Johannesevangeliums*, ed. Jörg Frey and Udo Schnelle, WUNT 175 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 309–310, with citations of extensive literature; cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:346–347.

[4] David T. Runia, *Philo of Alexandria and the* Timaeus *of Plato* (Amsterdam: Free University of Amsterdam, 1983), 68. The *locus classicus* of the distinction was Plato's *Timaeus* 27d5–28a4. The distinction at issue is not really intelligible vs. sensible; rather it is being vs. becoming. The problem with the former characterization of the distinction is that it seems to leave no place for immaterial concrete objects like angels or souls. Given that intelligible objects exist in the mind of God, such beings cannot be classed as part of the intelligible realm. They must be part of the sensible realm, which is thus more accurately described as the realm of objects subject to temporal becoming. On this view God, though concrete, belongs to the realm of being and so is changeless.

[5] See Audrey N. M. Rich, "The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Mnemosyne* 7 (1954): 123–333. R. M. Jones says that the doctrine of the Platonic Ideas as God's thoughts was so well-known by Philo's time that Philo could employ it without hesitation (Roger Miller Jones, "The Ideas as the Thoughts of God," *Classical Philology* 21, no. 4 [1926]: 317–326).

> and archetypal example, the Creator of the universe sets in order his material creations and makes them attain their proper ends. . . .
>
> All that has by nature with systematic method been arranged in the universe seems both in part and as a whole to have been determined and ordered in accordance with number, by the forethought and the mind of him that created all things; for the pattern was fixed, like a preliminary sketch, by the domination of number preexistent in the mind of the world-creating God, number conceptual only and immaterial in every way, but at the same time the true and the eternal essence, so that with reference to it, as to an artistic plan, should be created all these things, time, motion, the heavens, the stars, all sorts of revolutions.[6]

Notice that the material world is created on the pattern pre-existing in the immaterial divine mind. Philo concurred. The intelligible world (*kosmos noētos*), he maintains, may be thought of as either formed by the divine Logos or, more reductively, as the Logos itself as God is engaged in creating. In his *On the Creation of the World according to Moses* 16–20 he writes:

> God, because he is God, understood in advance that a fair copy would not come into existence apart from a fair model, and that none of the objects of sense-perception would be without fault, unless it was modeled on the archetypal and intelligible idea. When he had decided to construct this visible cosmos, he first marked out the intelligible cosmos, so that he could use it as an incorporeal and most god-like paradigm and so produce the corporeal cosmos, a younger likeness of an older model, which would contain as many sense-perceptible kinds as there were intelligible kinds in that other one.

Notice that Philo holds corporeal things to be patterned on the incorporeal models in the divine mind.

We cannot know if the author of the prologue to John's Gospel embraced a Middle Platonic doctrine of divine ideas. But whether or not he did, there can be no doubt, I think, that given the similarity of his Logos doctrine to that of Middle Platonism, he understood God and his Logos to transcend the material realm and so to be immaterial in nature.[7]

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[6] Nicomachus of Gerasa, *Introduction to Arithmetic* I.4, 6, trans. Martin Luther D'Ooge (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1926), 187, 189.

[7] The same Middle Platonism, epitomized in Philo, that forms the background of John's prologue also shapes the traditions that Paul hands on. See discussion in my *God Over All: Divine Aseity and the Challenge of Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 24–27.

2.1.2 Divine Omnipresence

Second, in addition to biblical passages like those cited earlier on divine transcendence and creation, passages expressing God's omnipresence are naturally interpreted to imply divine immateriality. We shall review scriptural data supporting God's ubiquity when we discuss the divine attribute of omnipresence.[8] For now suffice it to say that biblically God is not thought to be located in a particular place as material objects are but is said to be everywhere in space. If we think of divine omnipresence as God's transcending space while being cognizant of and active at every place in space, then divine immateriality follows at once, since any material object is spatially located. On the other hand if we take God to exist spatially, it would be implausible to think of him as extended throughout all space like the aether of nineteenth century physics, for then parts of him would exist here and parts there, which is certainly not the biblical notion of God's entire presence to anyone wherever he might find himself (Ps 139.7–10). Wherever anyone is in space God is there to help him when called upon. If God is spatially located, then, he must be wholly located at every region of space that he occupies, that is to say, at every region. In that case, he would have to be extended throughout space after the fashion of a mereologically simple object, having no proper spatial parts but occupying multiple regions of space. Some Christian theists, as we shall see, conceive the soul to be so extended throughout the body, wholly present at every spatial sub-region of the body, and some have even suggested that God, too, may be extended throughout space, wholly present at every region. But these thinkers conceive God and the soul to be immaterial beings and so able to have no parts located at different places in space. How a material object could be spatially extended and yet simple is almost unimaginable, although some philosophers have defended such a notion.[9] We can say with assurance that none of the scriptural writers affirms such a conception of God as an extended, material simple. It is far more plausible that if they assumed God to be literally spatially present everywhere, it was because God was thought to be an immaterial spirit (Ps 139.7).

[8] See *infra*, chap. 8.

[9] Cody Gilmore, "Location and Mereology," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Fall 2018 Edition), §5 "Extended Simples," https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2018/entries/location-mereology/.

2.1.3 Divine Imperceptibility

Third, the biblical descriptions of God as indiscernible to the five senses confirm divine immateriality. The Scriptures repeatedly testify that God is invisible. I Timothy speaks of him "whom no man has ever seen or can see" (6.16) and offers this doxology: "To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be power and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1.17). God's invisibility will naturally encompass not merely God's imperceptibility by eyesight, but also his imperceptibility by the rest of the five senses, such as touch and smell. In Rom 1.18–20 Paul says that though God is in heaven, "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made." Moreover, Paul says of Christ that "in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2.9), and thus "He is the image of the invisible God" (Col 1.15). In the same way, Jn 1.18 states, "No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (cf. 6.46; I Jn 4.12, 20). God's imperceptibility to the five senses, apart from his revelation in the world and his embodiment in Christ, is naturally accounted for by God's not being a physical object.

2.1.4 Prohibition of Divine Images

Fourth, the OT prohibition of making images of God (Ex 20.4–5a) is ultimately rooted in divine incorporeality. The prohibition is motivated, not by the danger of inaccurately portraying God's material form, but more fundamentally in his lacking such a form altogether, so that physical images inevitably distort. Moses warns, "Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure. . . . if you act corruptly by making a graven image in the form of anything, . . . you will soon utterly perish from the land" (Dt 4:15–16, 25–26). God is not to be portrayed in paintings, in statuary, in any sort of visual image. For any sort of image, however beautiful, however artistically inspiring, will diminish who God is by portraying him in some necessarily limited, corporeal way.

2.1.5 Divine Spirituality

Fifth, God is described in Scripture as a spirit, which implies his immateriality. We need not be distracted by the vast range of meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words *rûaḥ* and *pneuma,* both translated as "spirit."[10]

[10] See the thorough treatment in Hermann Kleinknecht et al., "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968), 6: 332–451.