

# Jesus Christ, Eternal God

HEAVENLY FLESH AND THE METAPHYSICS  
OF MATTER

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## Introduction

What is matter, and why does it matter to Christianity? I ask these questions in chapter 1, which provides an overview of my book. After a brief examination of the role of physics in returning matter to its metaphysical origins, I situate my project by contrasting it to three plausible alternatives: Berkeley's immaterialism, emergent materialism, and the idea of the world as God's body. I conclude chapter 1 with a first sketch of a philosophical version of my thesis. The question of what aspects of human experience should be attributed to the divine—and how best to do so—is notoriously thorny, but I raise the thought experiment of adding matter to the list. This is a sketch because, although I argue throughout the book that matter is a perfection of the divine, I think that this argument needs to be Christologically grounded to be coherent.

Chapter 2 examines the earliest metaphysical arguments about matter that set the stage for so much of Christian thought. Ancient Greek philosophers, with some exceptions, argued that matter in itself (apart from the form it takes) is unknowable, a position that should have bothered Christian theologians more than it did. Plato not only initiated this train of thought about matter, but he can also be credited with being the first systematic philosopher of the idea of the immaterial. Aristotle revised Plato's understanding of immateriality and complicated his theory of matter without overthrowing Plato's intuition into matter's basically elusive character. The Christian conviction that God is immaterial actually took a long time to develop, but it is a direct heritage of Plato's thought as well as a response to the Greek insistence on matter's uncreated status. This chapter also discusses two other philosophical positions on matter. The first is from the Stoics, who provided the only significant alternative to a Platonic metaphysics of matter. While Stoicism did not influence Christianity nearly as much as Platonism, it is interesting to see where Tertullian was taking it (and to speculate how it could have been taken further) before the Stoic option was overwhelmed by Origen's and Augustine's appropriation of

Platonism. The second is Neo-Platonism, which took the elusiveness of matter in a darker direction than Plato and Aristotle. Neither the Neo-Platonists nor their opponents, the Gnostics, could fathom a form of matter that was both good and finite and thus, in some significant way, not opposed to the divine.

While the unknowable quality of matter (or, better put, the way in which only its qualities are known) was something Christians could begrudgingly accept, what did bother them was the Greek assumption that matter is eternal. That position challenged God's sovereignty and thus was worth fighting. Christian theologians adopted a strategy that broke the battle into two fronts. This strategy was, to say the least, complex and risky, and I will highlight its problems and weaknesses in chapter 3. The first move was to emphasize God's sovereignty over the physical world by defining God's creation of the world as *ex nihilo*. That is, God created matter out of nothing, which makes matter something very limited and particular rather than unbounded and chaotic. Whether this doctrine made matter more explicable, however, is the subject of much debate, because matter that has an absolute beginning can appear to be dependent on a divine decision the cause of which is hidden in the divine will. The second move was to transfer the concept of infinity (in a rehabilitated state) from matter to God. (Most Greek philosophers, but not Aristotle, thought that matter's eternity and infinity were consonant concepts.) God, Christians argued, not matter, is infinite, and God's infinity is as positive as matter's infinity was negative. God and matter thus became related as the unbounded to the bound. The problem is that just as drawing a temporal limit to matter did not necessarily make it more intelligible, taking away any limit from God definitely made the divine more incomprehensible. Both of these moves reinforce each other, and both became central to the Christian tradition. I examine their related trajectories through the theology of St. Augustine, as well as two completely different contemporary theologians. Colin Gunton pushes hard against Augustine's attitude toward matter, and I try to push Gunton even harder toward my own position. Meanwhile, David Hart embraces the infinity of God with an unbounded passion, and I try to show that the cost of making matter finite is the obfuscation of the nature of God.

Chapter 3 focuses on the problem of matter's eternity while chapter 4 focuses on matter's form. The ancients thought matter could be perceived only by its form, while matter in itself was formless. That God is immaterial meant that God has no form in the sense of having no substratum that takes a particular shape. Any form we attribute to God, therefore, must be a product of our own imagination. In opposition to this view, a new consensus has emerged in biblical studies and the cognitive sciences alike concerning the role of anthropomorphism in our understanding of God. Advances in biblical studies demonstrate just how intractable the anthropomorphic view of God was for the Hebrews, while recent work in the cognitive sciences show just how inescapable that anthropomorphism is even for modern believers. This chapter examines

the turning point on this issue in the Origenist crisis, which was a battle between followers of Origen and a group of Egyptian monks over the human-like shape of God. I end this chapter with a case study of Eberhard Jüngel that shows how theology is still too captivated by Kant's critique of metaphysics to take anthropomorphism with sufficient Christological seriousness.

Chapter 5 is in some sense the heart of the book. To ground my position in the tradition of the Church, I retrieve a seemingly obscure branch of that tradition called the heavenly flesh Christology. This retrieval should make for an interesting historical exercise in its own right. I address what this Christology is, who (if anyone) actually held it, and how confusions about it contributed to the split between Western and Eastern forms of Christianity. I also look at its various manifestations in Christian history, arguing that it often lies closer to the theological surface than one might suspect. I frame this chapter with a discussion of Robert Jenson's Christology, which comes close, at times, to my own position.

Chapter 6 continues my attempt to retrieve forgotten aspects of the Christian tradition related to heavenly flesh Christology by focusing on Duns Scotus, Caspar Schwenckfeld, and Eastern Orthodox interpretations of the transfiguration. Scotus, who has been much maligned by contemporary theologians, is especially important for my project. His interpretation of the incarnation, called the Primacy of Christ thesis, is foundational for my outlook, although, admittedly, I appropriate it in ways not always in keeping with his original intentions. His views on matter are also a refreshing alternative to the Thomistic tradition that, for all of its purported Aristotelian newness, does not depart significantly from the dominant model that was developed during the patristic period.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on two of the most important theologians who have touched on all the issues I am addressing. Thomas Aquinas is the best representative of classical theism (which basically is the position that God is immaterial), so I try to show how certain weaknesses in his thought point to a heavenly flesh solution. Karl Barth is sometimes thought to have rejected metaphysics altogether, but I argue that he has a metaphysical position that comes very close to the one I am advocating.

Chapter 9 might be the most controversial of my book, because I am convinced that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has much to contribute to contemporary theology, especially on the topic of Christian materialism. Unfortunately, creedal Christians rarely take Mormonism seriously. Perhaps the main reason for this neglect is the Mormon rejection of creation out of nothing, which puts it at odds with most of Western metaphysics and Christian theology. None of its philosophical positions has made it more prone to scholarly condescension than this one. Moreover, any attempt to articulate the perfectibility of matter runs the risk of being accused of a conspiratorial alliance with the hermetic tradition, a confluence of magical, reli-

gious, and philosophical teachings that made every effort to infuse spirit into matter. Hermeticism is the opposite of Gnosticism; it seeks to enable matter to reach its potential by discerning the seeds of creativity planted therein (and thus is the father of emergent materialism), while Gnosticism sees matter as the evil product of an evil creator. I defend the Mormon tradition from the charge of esotericism, though admittedly its metaphysical presuppositions can be reconstructed in a variety of ways, given the informality of much Mormon theology. I think that traditional or creedal theologians have more to learn from Mormonism than any other religious tradition today, and that the Mormon position on matter can be reasonably defended, though I offer some suggestions on how to revise it in the light of the teaching of heavenly flesh.

Finally, in chapter 10, I begin to map out the metaphysical parameters of a fully embodied God. Philosophical theologians have examined the question of God's relationship to time from every imaginable perspective, but God's relationship to space has been much neglected. My own attempts in this direction have been informed by the impressive work of Marcel Sarot and Luco Van den Brom, two of the leaders of the Utrecht school of philosophical theology. I end this chapter by returning to Barth to argue, once again, that he offers us creative theological resources for taking matter to new metaphysical heights. His theology of God's space and its Christological form should break open scholarly debates about eternity and infinity and motivate a renewed interest in the importance of a Christian cosmology. At the very least, if I am wrong about everything I say here, I want to claim that I have good company, even if I want to go further than Barth was willing to go in lifting up the absolute eternity of the incarnate Jesus Christ. Everything I write here has that and only that end in mind.



## Thinking with Matter

### **From Metaphysics to Physics and Back Again**

Not all that long ago, in the time and place we call the modern world, everyone believed in matter, but we are postmodern now, and matter is not what it used to be. In the ancient and medieval worlds, matter was the domain of philosophy and theology, but in the modern world, science claims exclusive property rights over this terrain, and for good reason. Science makes matter pay. Modernity can be defined by its confidence in the power of knowledge to transform the world and its optimism in unlimited human advancement. Postmodernity is the recognition that the dream of building a new and better world has an untenable basis in reality. Science itself played a significant role in the transition from modern hubris to postmodern befuddlement. When physicists started poking holes in our commonsense preconceptions about the basic building blocks of the physical world, the confidence and optimism of modernity drained away right through them. Those holes were not poked gently. Physicists had to persuade the atom to disclose its secrets by subjecting it to extreme violence from high-energy projectiles. Sifting through the resulting debris, physicists found indications of new elementary particles, like the quark, which is, nonetheless, a theoretical construct that has never been isolated in the laboratory. Beneath the solid and steady appearance of objects with mass and volume are weird relationships and unknown proportions that defy the imagination of even the most theoretically astute. Matter at this level might as well be thought of as immaterial.

An atom, it turns out, is less like a bouncing ball than a funhouse of mirrors in which balls disappear and reappear in mind-boggling ways. Nor does it help much to change the picture from little clumps of incredibly small bits of the same substance to a grid pulsating with random disturbances, which conjures something like a bunch of balls bouncing on a soccer field during an earthquake.

When we peer into an atom, metaphors and mathematics both break down. The more progress we make scientifically, it seems, the more we return to the old metaphysical muddles. To think about matter is to think about what it means to think. If we can break anything apart, how can there be something so singular that it is absolutely indivisible? And if matter is more like a continuum of a malleable substance than a set of the most basic things, how can we ever know that our analysis of it has come to an end? The closer we come to matter, it seems, the more “it” coyly withdraws—to the point that scientists do not even have a consensus definition of what they are looking for. Whatever the distance that separates the ancients from us, physics and metaphysics are once again inextricably linked.

Just talk to any physicist, as I have done in my own college, and you will hear some startling claims. The great majority of the stuff that comprises the universe consists of dark matter and dark energy, and nobody knows what that stuff really is. To be more exact, ordinary matter constitutes only 4 percent of the universe, with the other 96 percent consisting of two kinds of entities that have been named but not yet described in any satisfying detail. About 23 percent of the universe consists of dark matter and 73 percent consists of dark energy. Physicists call dark matter “dark” because it does not interact with light, but if light is more than just another form of matter—if light is the principle of knowledge, in the sense that we cannot detect anything without it—then how will we ever really know what dark matter is? And, as if matters are not bad enough already, what about anti-matter, the lurking shadow of the physical world that is a favorite subject of science fiction because it destroys any ordinary matter that it touches?<sup>1</sup>

Of course, there is plenty of ordinary matter out there that we do know about, but even much of it is not ordinary in any sense of that word. Neutrinos, for example (the word means small and neutral), were postulated as a hypothetical reality before their existence was confirmed by scientific experiments. The product of certain kinds of radioactive decay, neutrinos pass through “ordinary” matter without much chance of detection. In fact, more than 50 trillion pass through the human body every second! The standard model of the neutrino says that it has no mass, even though the standard definition of matter is anything that takes up space and has mass. Neutrinos seem to be as pervasive as they are nearly nonexistent, so what kind of material are they made of?

Matter is not just stranger than people used to think it is. Its strangeness is what matter appears to be. Just say the word quantum and the imagination begins to leap. Modern physics has turned that word, *quantum*, which simply means a measurement or amount (and thus the related word *quantity*), into a symbol of unpredictable or unexplainable change. As Niels Bohr, one of the founders of quantum mechanics, quipped, “Those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most startling revelation of quantum theory is that subatomic

particles interact with each other to such a degree that they do not seem to have separate identities. This is called entanglement, a wonderfully redolent and appropriately nebulous word. As Louisa Gilder in a recent book on the phenomenon explains, “No matter how far they move apart, if one [subatomic particle] is tweaked, measured, observed, the other seems to instantly respond, even if the whole world now lies between them. And no one knows how.”<sup>3</sup> Spooky is a word that is often associated with entanglement. If bits of matter can be in two places at the same time and influence each other across vast distances of space, then the sky has no limits, which might account for the vast number of books that have quantum in the title—from Tibetan Buddhism to the science of wealth and happiness.<sup>4</sup> Quantum theory begs for philosophical explication. In Gilder’s words, “A classical (i.e., pre-quantum) equation, after its terms were defined, essentially explained itself. With the quantum revolution, the equations fell silent. Only an interpretation allowed them to speak about the natural world.”<sup>5</sup> Nonetheless, just because quantum theory gets used as a metaphor for anything that is uncertain does not mean that science has reached the end of its quest for matter’s essential nature. I have no doubt that physicists will continue to uncover new forms of matter and new quirks in the laws that govern them. High-energy experiments impose such artificial conditions on the atom that they blur the line between discovery and creation. As long as we can impose new conditions on atoms, we will doubtlessly discover new aspects of their internal composition. How this plunge into the bottomless depths of matter could ever have an upper limit of finality or closure is hard to imagine.

### **Getting to the Bottom of the Matter**

Given the rapid changes in the state of our knowledge about atoms, the burden of this book is not that theologians need to master the latest hypotheses of theoretical physics. Theologians do, however, need to master the metaphysics of the ancient Greeks, to whom modern science keeps returning us, and from which patristic theology took its bearings. There were atomists among the Greeks, but they were so confident that the world consists of unchanging building blocks that atomic science today resembles their opponents more than them. What physicists think of the atom is not what Democritus had in mind. Physicists today are much closer to the Platonic tradition, which argued that when we think about matter, we are thinking about the form it takes, and thus we are not really thinking about matter at all. Think about it: If matter, whatever it is, always takes a shape that is the object of our perception, how can we ever strip away its form in order to reveal what lies within it? When we break open one form, we find another. Like a set of ornamental Chinese boxes, matter is form all the way down.

The ancient Greeks and the hard sciences (misnamed, since there is nothing hard about matter on the subatomic level) share an abiding sense of the elusiveness of matter's essence, but the ancient Greeks and the social sciences (also misnamed, since psychology has trumped sociology in explaining human nature) could not be further apart. Matter in the Platonic tradition is what thinking thinks through, since it is, especially in the form of our own obdurate and decaying bodies, the chief impediment to thought itself. Matter is malleable; truth is constant, and so on. To think, from this perspective, is to resist the downward pressures that muddy the waters of self-transparency. The social sciences go to the other extreme of making thinking a material act. The cognitive sciences, for example, collapse the mind into the brain, and most analytic philosophers support this move by rejecting any vestige of a so-called ghostly soul steering uninspired flesh. The ancients thought that thinking must be of a different order—a different kind of substance, the ancients would say—from the order of physical things. That is, thinking cannot be an object in the world if it is able to grasp what objects are and what the world is. Surely the ancients were right that thinking is an upward movement of the spirit, but that does not mean that it must be defined in opposition to matter. As the modern view rightly insists, the elevating movement of even the most refined thought begins in the specific and tangible connections of one body acting on another. Perhaps, again, the extremes of each position are too extreme. Philosophers and scientists who claim that matter alone can give rise to thought sound incredulous, just as the ancient claims that the immaterial is the most real seem inconceivable. If both extremes are wrong, then spirit and matter must be related in ways that we do not yet fully comprehend.

Perhaps we need to take a step back from metaphysics, however, to see what is at stake in our discussion. From an existential perspective, we can surmise that when the ancients said that God is not matter, they were speaking from a very particular kind of experience. They looked around at the material world and saw death, disease, and dissolution. They knew that the possessions that spark delight in the dawn of our lives just as easily become cold and burdensome with the coming of night. Matter is heavy, finite, and recalcitrant. It has no beginning, they thought, just as it will have no end, but its eternity simply signifies its chaotic inclinations and its perpetual need to be ordered. It endures in a way that human persons, as rational animals, do not, and thus it is a source of moral as well as metaphysical puzzlement. Given matter's opacity to both the moral will and the illumination of the intellect, the ancients naturally concluded that God does not share any of its most noticeable features. Can we affirm that conclusion if we no longer accept its premises?

After all, we do not share the way the ancients shunned matter's shackling weight. Instead, we turn matter against itself in order to liberate ourselves from its constraints. Rather than bemoan matter, we recruit it for our utopian schemes to remake the world. The ancients thought that matter was boundless,

while today we think it is our power over matter that is infinite. For the ancients, matter was an obdurate riddle that only wisdom could solve; for us, it is an exciting opportunity for social advancement and personal gain. Morally speaking, modern hubris is hardly an improvement on ancient humility. Theologically speaking, the modern view of matter as the medium through which we assert our will and the substance upon which we stamp our desires hardly makes matter more appropriate as an attribute of the divine than the ancient intuition of matter as that which refuses to cooperate with us. In the ancient view matter lies too far beneath God to be incorporated into an idea of divinity, while in the modern view matter is the means by which humanity raises itself to the level of the gods. True, the modern view has brought us riches and comforts untold, but it is evidence of our postmodernity that we recognize the environmental and moral price we have had to pay for those riches. The point is not that we need to choose between a derogatory and an idealized view of matter, but that we need theological resources to challenge and revise modernity in the direction of a more humble (and more properly exalted) understanding of matter's destiny.

Matter is the quintessential metaphysical topic, but it is also a deeply biblical theme. The Gospel, after all, is a treasure in a clay jar (2 Cor. 4:7), which immediately raises the question of the composition and quality of the clay. Nonetheless, one of the deepest insights of traditional monotheism is that God is spirit—and that spirit can be best understood in contrast, if not opposition, to matter. It follows that if matter is no longer matter, we should rethink spirit too. Otherwise, what sense does it make to assume that God is immaterial if matter is far closer to the spiritual than we ever imagined? Moreover, if matter conveys the spiritual—the incarnation, after all, is the clay—could the spiritual be in some sense material? Could it be said that the body of Jesus Christ transcends and encompasses (and thereby redefines) both spirit and matter?

Consider the simple claim that God is not nothing. It would seem to follow that God is something. Classical theism, however, vehemently disagrees. Classical theism is the consensus position on the nature of God that emerges with Origen and Augustine and climaxes with Aquinas. One of its core commitments is to God's immateriality, and one can easily see why. For classical theists, God is neither nothing nor something because God is not anything in particular, and thus God is unlike everything else we know. God's substance is unique, though no matter how hard (or impossible) it is to define, it can always be contrasted to whatever matter is. Indeed, not being material is the clearest indication of what kind of substance God is, since (with the possible exception of angels and mathematics) everything we experience is given to us through the physical world. In our world, matter, whatever it is, is everywhere, but God is more everywhere than that. God transcends the physical world and exists apart from the constraints we associate with material shape. To understand what the divine substance is, then, we obviously need a clear definition of matter. That is

especially true since, given God's uniqueness, classical theism defines the divine substance not positively in terms of what God is but negatively in terms of what God is not. It follows that if classical theism is wrong about the nature of matter, it might not be right about the nature of God. It is not necessarily wrong about the nature of God, since it could still hold the proper understanding of divine substance even if it based that understanding on a wrong premise, but at the very least, classical theists would need to rethink their reasons for believing in God's immateriality.

Of course, there are many ways of thinking about the relation of spirit and matter without defining them in terms of their opposition to each other. One could talk, for example, of the infinite distance that separates them, though it is hard to know what the concept of distance means when it is applied to a realm of being that is not material. Infinite, in this case, is not an instrument of measurement but rather an indication that all measurement breaks down when comparing the material with the immaterial. Theologically speaking, then, it seems not to be the case that God is the opposite of matter, because if God were, then the incarnation would be a contradiction of the divine nature, and Jesus could not have ascended into heaven in a glorified but still recognizable form (unless there is such a thing as an immaterial body). Christians claim that God chose to become incarnate, which suggests, at the very least, that whatever God is, God is compatible with matter. After all, God created it good, and God is good, so there must be a deep and abiding connection between God's nature and the nature that God made room for when God created the world.

What is odd in current debates about the relationship of spirit and matter is a certain asymmetry that dominates the discussion. Go to any bookstore and you will find many publications that treat matter spiritually, but you will find far fewer books that treat the spirit materially. Take the books that treat matter spiritually. Books on healing tout the ways in which degenerating matter can be revived by positive mental energy. Books on ethics celebrate our embodiment as the locus of all things good and natural. Books on evolution assure us that matter alone has the energy to perform purposeless tricks of life-giving creativity. We are matter-obsessed, which is not necessarily a good thing. We live in a world that is constantly and, for the most part, mindlessly celebrating the ways of the flesh. Christian theology does not need to add its voice to the revelry just for the sake of trying to stay relevant. It is my position that if we reconsider the relationship of matter and spirituality by simply imbuing matter with spirituality, we will end up with all sorts of indefensible consequences. We will end up, that is, telling the world what it already thinks it knows.

So we need to start at the other end, so to speak, by finding the proper grounding for a materialistic interpretation of the spiritual. Although there are far fewer books in this category, there is an emerging camp of Christian theologians who are trying to figure out what it might mean to conceive of the soul as a species of matter.<sup>6</sup> So far, their attempts have been mired in insuperable

technical difficulties and perplexities. The danger, once again, is that treating the spirit materially will end up accommodating Christianity to the predominantly materialistic ethos of secular society. Some of these theologians rely on a program of metaphysical minimalism to eschew the soul as an outdated concept that serves no modern function. What the soul once did—providing an account of the uniqueness of each individual life, distinguishing humans from other animals, and explaining the continuity of personal identity in the after-life—can be done just as well by other conceptual tools. Applying Occam’s razor to explanatory entities that are not absolutely necessary is always a risky enterprise in the realm of religion. Besides, privileging simple explanations over complex ones is typically a matter of aesthetic judgment rather than the formulaic application of a methodological principle. My position will be metaphysically robust, not minimalistic. I want to engage the classical metaphysical tradition of immaterialism head-on by developing an equally rigorous alternative. Moreover, I believe that any Christian metaphysics should begin and end in Christology, so that my metaphysical approach to matter will depend upon a prior investigation into the nature of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, a Christian materialism that begins with premises drawn from the secular world will inevitably end up reflecting too many assumptions that are alien to the Christian faith.

Before I make a first sketch of my position, I would like to present three other alternatives to the way the ancients connected spirit and matter. The first tries to resolve their relationship by denying any reality to matter, thus making the problem disappear by eliminating one of its constituents. I am referring, of course, to metaphysical idealism. The second—emergent materialism—grants matter creative properties that can account for the emergence of spirituality. The reality of the spiritual realm is not denied (its defenders claim), although its autonomy is, since the spiritual is seen as a byproduct (whether planned or accidental) of essentially material processes. Like a magician’s sleight of hand, emergent materialism takes certain attributes of spirituality, like freedom and creativity, and claims to find them in matter, which becomes evidence of matter’s capacity to transcend its own limitations. Spirit thus inheres in matter’s ability to not be itself. Emergent materialism, then, is closer to metaphysical idealism than is commonly assumed. The third tries to bring together the spiritual and the material in the idea that the world is God’s body.

### **What My Position Is Not, Number One: Berkeley’s Immaterialism**

In his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, George Berkeley bluntly and boldly rejects the “opinion strangely prevailing amongst men that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding.”<sup>7</sup> Most people think that

Berkeley's position is the strange one, and it has never prevailed among philosophers, but the best way to understand his innovative metaphysics, as several scholars have pointed out, is to see it as a form of old-fashioned Christian apologetics.<sup>8</sup> Berkeley set out to defend the immediate providence of God over every natural event in the universe, and he did so by demonstrating how creation is metaphysically dependent on God. He was concerned about advances in modern science that had depicted the universe as clock-like in its self-sufficiency. If the world runs according to its own laws, he surmised, every event can be explained without reference to any power beyond nature. God might have framed the laws, but God was not needed once those laws were implemented. Berkeley, as a devout Christian, could not accept this cosmology. Berkeley wanted a divine being who was actively involved in the world, and how more active can one get than a God who sustains the world by keeping his attention ever focused on every little thing. His immaterialism was thus an understandable response to Deism (understandable in the sense that one extreme gives rise to another, though Berkeley's extremism is more forgivable than Deism's because his motivations were unimpeachable). The bad theology of Deism prompted Berkeley's less than stellar philosophical response. Berkeley was metaphysically ingenious, but there are alternatives to Deism that are not so blatantly counter-intuitive.

Berkeley's idealism was a response not only to deism but also to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. He thought that a spiritual being could never create a material world out of nothing. Minds only bring forth mental objects (like causes like), and Berkeley was not hesitant to apply this principle to God. Berkeley does not quite make this argument, but we could add to his case the following question. If there are such things as purely spiritual entities, then why would God need to create material objects? The very existence of matter, that is, requires something like a theodicy, as Plato (we will see) knew very well. Berkeley did not take seriously the possibility that God is material, which also would have solved his metaphysical conundrum. Instead, to overcome the impasse between an immaterial deity and a material world, he simply deleted matter from the world.

If quantum mechanics has proven that our knowledge of physical objects is dependent on our knowledge of ourselves as intervening observers (a proposition that is highly debated among philosophers of science), then the idea that the physical objects of the world are dependent on the thoughts of God is not as far-fetched as common sense assumes. Debates continue about the proper conditions for the emergence and success of modern science, but it is not necessarily a good argument against Berkeley to insinuate that his metaphysics could not underwrite the scientific method. As Jeffrey Eaton, one of his modern defenders, contends, "The natural sciences have no stake in matter as an absolute existent."<sup>9</sup> The scientific method operates on the forms objects take, regardless of the ontological status of what the forms inform.



Nonetheless, if matter is “an abstraction for which there is no sensible evidence,”<sup>10</sup> it still seems to most of us to be presupposed in all of our interactions with the world. Berkeley radically shakes up our Kantian complacency about the existence of a thing-in-itself beyond our senses by forcing upon us the decision to choose either God or matter. The modern world has obviously chosen the latter, so is it any wonder, from Berkeley’s perspective, why secularism is so pervasive in those societies that are the most materialistically advanced? For those discouraged by capitalism’s apotheosis in the commodification of every desire, Berkeley’s metaphysical eccentricities can be seen as an antidote to modern pathologies well worth reconsidering.

There is something appealing about Berkeley’s consistency, then, beyond the half-hearted suggestions one often hears in the secondary literature about how he anticipates quantum mechanics or how he reconciles the old battle between facts and values. What makes him still philosophically interesting is that he follows logic wherever it leads. What makes him theologically interesting is that he follows to the very end the argument that the world is an expression of God’s nature. Along these lines, Berkeley made a remarkable admission in his notebooks: “Matter once allowed. I defy any man to prove that God is not matter.”<sup>11</sup> Berkeley denied matter’s reality because he could not imagine any form of it existing within an immaterial deity. He also thought that any matter that exists outside of and independent of God is incompatible with God’s power and glory. God must be all in all, or God must be material. He thus turned matter into an idea existing in the mind of God, but by doing so, he rendered our senses untrustworthy and thus threatened to overthrow the project of philosophy altogether. If Berkeley is even partially right, however, then the reality of matter cannot be taken for granted. If matter is real, then it must have its origin in God, and not just in God’s mind. The only way to escape Berkeley’s metaphysics is to move matter not just into God’s mind but into God’s body.

To their credit, two recent scholars have grasped that Berkeley’s project, if it is to survive, must be retrieved through a reexamination of its relationship to the body of Christ. Marc Hight and Joshua Bohannon begin their revival of Berkeley’s immaterialism by arguing that the traditional Christology summed up by the Council of Chalcedon “mandates that the Son be understood as simultaneously wholly immaterial and partially material.”<sup>12</sup> That mandate, in their version of it, reveals an intractable “contradiction inherent in claiming that a single person has (at least) a partly material nature and an entirely immaterial one.”<sup>13</sup> Their solution to this contradiction avoids the tempting alternatives of portraying Christ as either wholly material or wholly immaterial. Instead, they choose to raise the stakes by making all matter, not just Christ’s body, immaterial. Like a magician who makes the hat disappear along with the rabbit, with one swoop of a redefinition they resolve the paradox that lies at the heart of Christian faith: “By removing material substance the pressing contradiction is removed.”<sup>14</sup> If Berkeley is right that no bodies are material—because

matter, in his mind, is nothing more than an idea; it is not a substance independent of mental reality—then Christ’s immateriality poses no special problem for theology. Hight and Bohannon admit that they need to take the responsibility of defending their position from the accusation of Docetism (an ancient heretical position that denied the reality of Christ’s body). They think they succeed at this task by changing the rules about what reality means. Just as our bodies are nothing more than our experience of sensible ideas, Christ’s body is God’s experience of a sensible idea. More specifically, the Son of God experiences himself having a body so that others may see his body too. Christ’s body is as real as it needs to be. The incarnate Christ is as human as us, which is not saying much.

Hight and Bohannon thus escape the charge of Docetism at the Christological level only by embracing it at the metaphysical level. They push Berkeley in the right direction—toward Christology—but they end up inadvertently demonstrating Berkeley’s limitations. Just as Berkeley’s metaphysical strength lies in his theological commitments, his metaphysical weaknesses are theological as well. Berkeley’s God thinks about matter, but this is not the Father embracing the Son. God, for Berkeley, never gets beyond the realm of ideas because the Father has nothing to give the Son. From my point of view, God creates matter because God the Father wills the Son to have a form that is not just a repetition of the divine substance, and by doing so, the Father redefines what the divine substance really is. With Hight and Bohannon, there is no difference between the Father and the Son because there is no difference between God and the world. I certainly do not want to go in the opposite direction of Berkeley by making matter the only reality. Indeed, the problem with Berkeley and Hight and Bohannon is that they play off matter and spirit against each other, as if one must choose which substance is more real. A properly Trinitarian account of what the Father gives the Son and how the Son lies at the heart of creation will bring spirit and matter together, without collapsing one into the other.

### **What My Position Is Not, Number Two: Emergent Materialism**

Hight and Bohannon try to make matter a species of the spirit, while John Cobb, one of the earliest proponents of emergent materialism, tries to make the spirit a species of matter. Years ago, under the influence of Alfred North Whitehead and process philosophy, Cobb raised the prospect of what would happen to theological claims about God if theologians honestly faced the blurring of the boundary between the spiritual and the material. He begins his own thought experiment with the premise that we do not really know what matter is any more. Many people continue to think that the universe is comprised of subatomic entities that are solid and inert. Physics teaches otherwise. Electrons, for example, are more like events than things. “Hardly any of the characteristics we

commonly attribute to a stone—such as its massive endurance and self-identity through time, its passivity, its impermeability—apply to an electron.”<sup>15</sup> The electron traces a trajectory of events or happenings, transmitting energy from the past to the future. Using electrons instead of stones as a model, Cobb defines matter as an energy-event. The hyphen is crucial: Matter has shape and takes place but only, at the atomic level, in terms of the amorphousness of energy and the flickering of isolated events.

Cobb argues that what takes place on the atomic level applies to every level of reality, no matter how “high” that level is conceived. The category of energy-event thus applies to the mental as well as the material. Just as material events are not thoughtless links in a chain of necessary causation, thoughts are not immaterial activities secluded from the production and consumption of energy. The bottom line is that the physical, stripped of its old world connotations, begins to look (in the new world of quantum mechanics) a lot like the spiritual. If the invisibility of God once stood in the way of aligning matter and the divine, the invisibility of energy opens the door to a whole new understanding of the divine. Philosophers used to attribute the property of pure passivity to matter, which obviously makes it an absolute contrast to God’s pure activity (nothing can impede God’s will), but if matter is more active than people once thought, then why can’t we think of God today as possessing a kind of matter? Cobb encourages us to try to imagine a prime matter that is manifest in both physical and spiritual phenomena.

Cobb takes the revision of classical metaphysics in one direction, and I want to take it in another. Cobb thinks the blurring of the boundary between the spiritual and the material means that all events or entities have their own kind of consciousness, a position that is called panpsychism. I think panpsychism is an overreaction to the traditional view of matter as lifeless; it confronts one extreme (inert matter) with another (conscious material events). Attributing consciousness to all levels of reality is evidence of a metaphysical egalitarianism run amok. Metaphysical order can no more be conceived without some kind of clear hierarchy of value than the political order can be organized without a hierarchy of power. To be fair to Cobb, he does admit to degrees of self-awareness by means of variations in the intensity of experience, but his intent is to democratize the divine by grounding attributes ordinarily reserved for the highest levels of existence in the lowest forms of material organization. It is thus not surprising that in his most recent work he has taken his insights in the direction of theories about the evolutionary emergence of complex biological phenomena.<sup>16</sup> For him, the vision of matter saturated with mentality suggests that both the physical and the spiritual world have evolved from their prior fundamental unity. The idea that the stuff of the universe is already, and has always been, mental is the ground for the claim that radically new properties can be produced by the interactions within a relatively simple physical system.

Conceptualizing the reunification of theology and the biological sciences along the lines of the emergence of novel properties from aggregates of material particles is provocative and powerful, but it also risks giving biology the final say on what constitutes matter. It lets the randomness and conflict of evolution trump God's providential guidance of both human and natural history. Biology is expanded into metaphysics at the loss of the specificity of theological claims. Cobb tries to find space within matter for the divine, while I want to find space within the divine for matter. That space, for me, must be Christologically construed. Rather than attributing the fusion of the mental and the spiritual to the primordial structure of the universe, I want to attribute their primordial unity to Jesus Christ. In that way I hope to follow up on Cobb's radical insight about matter's vitality while strengthening, rather than weakening, the basics of traditional Christian belief.

### **What My Position Is Not, Number Three: The World as God's Body**

Emergent materialism quickly becomes entangled in questions about the nature of biological evolution, with most evolutionary theorists insisting that natural selection is a random process, so that matter gives rise to spirit in only the most haphazard and accidental fashion. One way of circumventing these issues is by grounding the relationship between spirit and matter in a more intimate unity. Thus it has become increasingly popular among contemporary theologians to argue that the world should be construed as God's body. The soundness of this hypothesis is deeply appealing to the modern mind: God can be depicted as feeling the world in an immediate way, and nature can be pictured as the organic expression of God's creativity. Since this position could be mistaken as having a constructive relationship to my own, I want to indicate why that is not the case.

One of the best arguments against the idea of the world as God's body has been summarized by William Wainwright: "It is natural to suppose that if God is perfect, His body must be perfect. The world, however, appears to be infected with various evils and imperfections, the most obvious of which are suffering and moral wickedness."<sup>17</sup> The conclusion is not that God does not have a body but that God's body, if God has one, must not be identified with anything riddled with evil and imperfections. One could sharpen this argument by defining evil and explaining what it means for a body to be perfect, but the point is basic enough to stand on its own. If God has a body, then God has chosen to identify himself with that body, and God cannot choose to be evil and still remain God. The problem of natural evil (why a good and loving God would permit the world to be so full of disease, destruction, and death) is hard enough to think about without raising the stakes and attributing those evils to the very being of God. We do not neglect our own bodies; why would God neglect his? If sound,

this argument decisively rules out the proposal that the world is God's body, but it does not rule out my position. It does have implications for my position, however. If the Son had a perfect body, wouldn't it have to be eternal, and how was it perfect during the incarnation, when Jesus Christ suffered and died on the cross? I will discuss these questions when I elaborate on Monophysite Christology in chapter 5.

There are other problems with the idea that the world is God's body. If the world is God's body, does that refer only to the physical world, or does it include our souls? If the-world-that-is-God's-body includes our souls, then we too are part of the body of God, but that means our bodies belong to God and us at the same time, so that God and our souls are either identical or struggle with each other to occupy the same domain. If the-world-that-is-God's-body does not include our souls, then the material and the immaterial aspects of the world can be fundamentally divided, with the former assigned to God's body. This also leads to conceptual problems. If all of the matter in the world comprises God's body, then what about the matter that is our bodies? How could our bodies be a part of God's bodies even though "we" are not?

Feminist theologians typically reject any dualistic division in the world between material and immaterial substances. As Grace Jantzen, who has written one of the best books on this topic, states: "My book is an effort to explore to what extent a holistic understanding of human personhood could offer insights into the relationship between God and the world."<sup>18</sup> The analogy that is traditionally drawn between God's relationship to the world and the relationship, in the human person, between the mind and the body bolsters the immateriality of the divine unless the mind is theorized in a materialistic fashion. Feminists have long argued that the classical view of the mind intentionally leaves out the dimension of space.<sup>19</sup> We intuitively understand our own temporality, but when we think about thinking, classical metaphysics leads us to ignore our extensionality. Picturing the mind as separate from the body can result in an abstract view of reason, while doing the opposite—taking a more holistic approach of the mind's relationship to the body—helpfully highlights the affective and emotive aspects of cognition, which, some feminists argue, are especially indicative of the way women experience the world. Jantzen wants to close the gap between the mind and the body and then apply that holistic philosophy to God's relationship to the world, but there is a problem with her project. She uses our mind-body relationship to understand God's relationship to the world, but she argues that there is no real distinction in us between our minds and our bodies, so it follows that there must be no distinction between God and the world. A holistic anthropology ends up in a pantheistic theology. Jantzen ends up undermining (or collapsing) the relationship of God to the world rather than illuminating (or explaining) it.

### A Short Note on the Revision of Doctrine

As these three positions demonstrate, rethinking the way that Greek metaphysical explanations of matter influenced Christian thought is hard work. The best way to do this work is to retell the history of the Christian appropriation of Platonism while looking for alternative theological paths that were not taken, even though they could have been. This renarration will take up much of this book, and it will climax with the lost history of heavenly flesh Christology. Renarrating the history of matter is made possible by the fact that there is no simple path through the thicket of the various discourses on matter's reality. As Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield observe in one of the first and still useful books on the history of the theories of matter, "The plot has no natural and inevitable thread; and, if our account is to be coherent and intelligible, we shall have to exercise the historian's prerogative and determine for ourselves what—in any period—are the significant episodes to recount."<sup>20</sup> Telling the story of matter involves a delicate reconstruction of some of the most basic and debatable issues in philosophy. Anyone wanting to revise the narrative of matter's path through philosophy and theology will first have to reconstruct that path, since there is no consensus about even the basic questions of who said what and why they said it. Nonetheless, there is a dominant tradition, with the rarefied thought of Plato and Aristotle ascending above the other philosophers, beckoning Christian theologians to refine their doctrines accordingly. It is hard to imagine early Christianity in anything other than Platonic guise, but only by transgressing the limits of our historical imagination can we begin to reconceive the metaphysical foundations of faith.

Given such a contentious scholarly subject, it should be clear that history provides us with no final theological answer to the question of matter. It does, however, put its weight behind the naturalness of the Platonic doctrine of the immateriality of the soul and the divine, and any attempt to revise that doctrine needs to be carefully justified. Here some taxonomy from George Lindbeck's famous book, *The Nature of Doctrine*, might be helpful.<sup>21</sup> Lindbeck begins with the simple point that doctrines have conditions as well as historical contexts. Some conditions might be permanent features of theology, but others might not be, and historical contexts change by definition. How does this apply to the issue of divine embodiment? Given the condition of Platonic metaphysics, the immateriality of the divine follows necessarily, and given the historical circumstances of battling the crudities of paganism as well as various Gnostic schools of metaphysical dualism, the teaching of immateriality was a wise choice guided by divine providence. The doctrine of immateriality was necessary, but only conditionally. Change the conditions and you change its necessity. In other words, it is a reversible doctrine. It is not like the teaching that God is love, which is everywhere and always a necessary (that is, unconditional) part of the faith. The immateriality of God can be construed, then, as conditionally necessary but (given a change in those conditions) reversible.

Of course, just because a doctrine is reversible does not mean that it should be reversed! Good reasons have to be put forward. Reversing any doctrine is a big step, so theologians need to see the alternative and weigh its pros and cons in order to judge whether the reversal is worth the effort. A good place to start that process is to examine the question of the divine attributes.

### **A First Approximation of My Position: Matter as One of God's Perfections**

The ancients debated the relationship of spirit and matter in terms of metaphysics, but most of the philosophical arguments against God's corporeality today depend upon a logical analysis of God's attributes, most notably that of omnipresence. These debates often come down to the following question: If God is omnipresent, how could he be located in a particular place? That question seems simple enough, to the point of being obvious, and further analysis appears to confirm this point. If bodies are, by definition, spatially extended, then an omnipresent, embodied God would have to be identical to space as such.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, if God were identical to space, and space were infinite, then God would be infinite in size, and conversely, if God were identical to space, and space were finite, then God would be the largest finite entity. Either way, there would be no room for any other bodies! Another way to see this point is to begin with the idea that bodies, again by definition, occupy space in such a way that only one body can occupy a particular place at a time. If God's body takes up all of space, then it follows that God's body would occupy the space that all other bodies occupy, which leaves no room for any other bodies to exist. For God's body to occupy the space of another body without being (or displacing) that body, God's body would have to be immaterial. But bodies are, again by definition, made of matter. It seems self-evident, then, that God is not embodied.

Classical theists also argue that the perfection of omnipotence excludes God's embodiment. If God is omnipotent, God must be able to influence everything in the world without any hindrance or impediment. God must be able to carry out that influence, in other words, without having to compete with the various physical causal processes that otherwise govern the world. If God had to compete with the causative agency of other bodies, then God would be just one cause among many causal processes. The image of a divine being competing with other forces to obtain his goals sounds more pagan than Christian. A God who is moved by other bodies and must displace those bodies in order to control causal sequences is subjected to too many indignities to be a God worthy of worship. The only way an embodied God could exercise causal influence on other bodies without competing with them would be if God occupied the same space as those bodies without displacing them, and once again, we have an argument for God's immateriality.

On the surface, these arguments seem sound, but they have two basic problems, one logical and the other theological. First, in terms of logic, these arguments presuppose what they set out to prove. That is, they assume that omnipresence and omnipotence pertain to features incompatible with materiality and that embodiment entails attributes that are incompatible with immateriality. Omnipresence is defined as the lack of location, and bodies are defined as things that are locatable, so, by definition, an omnipresent God cannot be embodied. Likewise, omnipotence is defined as the lack of causal competition, and bodies are defined as entities subjected to multiple causal forces, so that, again by definition, an omnipotent God cannot be embodied. These arguments come close to being arguments by definition, which are hardly arguments at all.

Second, in terms of theology, these arguments take their premises from abstract ideas rather than the concrete reality of revelation. Every theologian uses abstract ideas, of course, so it cannot be held that philosophy is alien to the Christian faith (no matter how much some theologians enjoy making this charge), but still, the question remains concerning the origin and shape of those ideas. Can we really find out what omnipresence and omnipotence are like just by closely unpacking the logic of those words? If God is present in Jesus Christ, who walked the earth as a man, and if God's power is made manifest in the cross, upon which Jesus Christ suffered and died, then don't we need to rethink what omnipresence and omnipotence mean? The idea of divine omnipotence, for one, has undergone so many critiques and revisions in modern theology that it would be churlish to use it as the premise in an argument against God's embodiment. The attributes of God are too contested to serve as a stable basis for rejecting the supposition of divine corporeality.

Take, for example, the attribute of simplicity. Classical theism maintains that God is absolutely simple, since God simply is God, without any internal divisions or parts that might fall into disharmony with each other. If God is without composition, and matter is by definition divisible, then God cannot be material. Nonetheless, many scholars have raised questions about the compatibility of this attribute with the doctrine of the Trinity. How can God be both simple and triune? There are answers to that question, of course, and I will discuss Thomas Aquinas's position in chapter 7, but reconciling simplicity and threeness is sufficiently difficult to problematize any facile attempt to use simplicity to exclude materiality in God. The problem, again, has to do not so much with simplicity itself but the source of our reflections on the attributes. The simple fact of the incarnation suggests that whatever we think of matter, matter is not repugnant to the divine. If Jesus Christ is the body of the Son, and the Son is God, then how can having a body detract from the divine?

Indeed, if Jesus Christ is the body of God, then shouldn't we think of matter as one of God's perfections? There are different ways of thinking about the proper way to formulate the divine attributes, but the two basic ways involve



negation and intensification (or eminence). The way of negation begins with our experience of a good in this life and then negates everything that limits that good. Since negations, no matter how many you pile up, cannot reach a positive affirmation, many theologians think the way of negation is dependent on the way of intensification. In the Scotist tradition (named after Duns Scotus), the way of intensification is firmly rooted in what philosophers call the “perfect being” argument. Scotus held that God is maximally excellent, so if we can grasp what makes us excellent (Scotus thought it was obvious that the answer to that question has nothing to do with our bodies), we can have some sense of how God is perfect. Begin with something good in this life, Scotus is saying, and then magnify it to no end.<sup>23</sup> (Scotus thinks, contrary to Aquinas, that some terms drawn from our experience are univocally, not analogically, applied to God; I will discuss this aspect of his thought in chapter 6.)

Both of these ways (negation and intensification) can seem to rule out matter as a divine perfection. Take omnipotence. If power is a (albeit mixed) good in this life, then stripping away everything that limits, confuses, or distorts our use of power should give us some idea of what power is for God. The material world is what we are most often exercising our power against, whether it is disease, dirt, or death. Wouldn't a purely powerful being exist outside of matter altogether? Or take omnipresence. We are most happy when we are present to each other or present in an activity that gives us meaning. Our being present, however, is impeded by the features of matter that keep us apart from each other and slow down the facility of our labors. Wouldn't a purely present being cut right through matter in order to get to the heart of every situation?

That sounds reasonable, but it also makes it impossible to reason about God. We cannot experience power or presence except as embodied creatures, and matter, far from being a mere impediment to the goods we seek to experience, actually makes those experiences possible. We exercise power not simply to destroy the matter that causes disease, dirt, and death but to preserve the material bodies we deeply care about. We enjoy being present to others because we take pleasure in the way that other bodies resist us and only gradually receive us, and we enjoy our work because and not in spite of its challenges. If others were transparent to our intentions and if objects did not frustrate our machinations, then conversation and labor alike would be too immediate to be part of a pedagogical process of give and take. We would always get our way, and thus we would learn nothing about ourselves. Matter, far from being an obstacle to our freedom, is the means by which we come to know ourselves by engaging true otherness. Matter is good, and if it is good, then we should be able to imagine it existing in a state of perfection (that is, we should be able to imagine resurrected, glorified bodies), and if it is potentially perfect, then it can be attributed to God.

Still, divine simplicity means that God is without division or parts, as I said above, and if God has no parts, then God cannot be made of matter, since to

be made of something suggests that there are at least two things being brought together. The idea of simplicity supports divine immateriality, but it also results in a puzzle about the attributes that has no clear resolution. Simply put, if God is not composite, then God has no substrate to which the divine attributes can be said to adhere. Each attribute cannot refer to something different about God. It follows that the divine perfections must cohere in God in perfect unity. If so, then perfection language about God is severely circumscribed, if not overthrown altogether. Omnipresence and omnipotence are not different descriptions of God but the same description under different labels. Not only do these terms mean the same thing but what they mean is impossible for us to say, since we understand ideas by comparing them with each other just as we know how to use words by rules that tell us how not to use them. If all perfection terms mean the same thing, then the way we differentiate them is a sign of our ignorance, so how can we apply them to God? Moreover, even if the way of negation works, why do we need to negate matter? If everything good needs to be reconceived in order to be applied to God, then attributes drawn from both the immaterial and the material aspects of our existence need to be equally revised and refined, which suggests that God is neither immaterial nor material—or perhaps God is both, but in a way that requires us to reconstruct their differences.

Thomas Aquinas tries to save the project of attributing perfections to God by his theory of analogy, and the commentaries on his theory are nearly endless, but even the most sympathetic commentators acknowledge that analogies between our experience and God's nature break down in the end because Aquinas insists on the uniqueness of the divine nature. God is essentially mysterious, primarily because God is immaterial. Angels and numbers are immaterial as well, but God is an agent who has all of our perfections but none of our material substance. If matter is involved in all of the ways we think about ourselves (except, we will see, when, for Aquinas, we think about thinking itself), then we cannot think with any clarity about a perfect, immaterial being. Aquinas's analogies thus slip into an unspeakable mysticism in the end.

A simpler way to save perfect being philosophy would be to admit matter into the prestigious list of perfections. This is just a first step toward my fuller position because there is nothing in this argument about matter as a perfection of the divine that necessarily denies that God is immaterial. God could be related to matter as, according to traditional accounts, our souls are related to our bodies. That is, God could be an immaterial being who has a body. The only way to discuss this further is to enter into the weighty analysis of the Trinitarian relationship of God the Father to God the Son, as well as the question of the nature of the pre-existent Son. For now, I simply want to note that attributing matter to God makes the whole process of perfect being attribution more coherent and plausible. If God is corporeal, then we are very much like God, and the goods we experience in this life can quite easily be imagined

existing in a perfect way in God. Those goods, in fact, can be univocally attributed to God, so that the problem of analogy (what is it we share with God that makes attribution possible) vanishes.

To repeat, I do not want to build my case for a corporeal God solely by reflecting on the potential perfection of matter. It would be too easy to begin with a set of abstractions that, in distinction to the traditional concepts of omnipresence and omnipotence, would be matter-friendly. That is one way to go about revising classical theistic metaphysics. We could say, for example, that vulnerability is good, that vulnerability involves material limitations, and thus God, as perfectly vulnerable, must be material. This way of operating treats the attributes as aspects of human subjectivity writ large, and it relies immoderately on our prejudices about what we think is important (and what is not important) in our lives. There is nothing inherently wrong in picking something out of our experience that we cherish and then transferring the pure form of that experience to God as long as this procedure is grounded in something more than our experience. It needs to be grounded in a reality that is more stable and solid than the shifting values we give to our fleeting perceptions. It needs to be grounded in Jesus Christ. When we do that, we will find that there are very strong reasons indeed to raise matter to the level of a transcendental perfection.