

risk-free versions of providence, but that it does worse. One central issue concerning the morality of risk is how the risk is distributed among those involved in the event. Welty points out that whatever the risks are that God takes, he does not suffer from them the way human beings often do. Welty asks a series of questions such as, "Will [God] perish due to lack of food, water, shelter, and good health? No." This one question is enough to see that for all the talk of God's risks, on open theism, it is the creatures that are most vulnerable. There is at least a *prima facie* case that God is more morally responsible if he adopts risky providence by creating a world with an open future than if he maintains a risk-free providence.

Welty's essay is simply excellent. His treatment of these themes is very careful. He draws on the writings of open theists as he lays out the details of the four relevant aspects of the problem of evil. In addition, he raises relevant objections to his assessments and answers them. This chapter will provide impetus for continued work for years to come.

In a short review, I can do no more than gesture at the contents of this book. Many of the essays warrant a deeper look. The collection as a whole has several strengths that are worth mentioning. First, the papers vary widely in topic and in philosophical perspective. They range over several metaphysical issues as well as issues more central to philosophical theology. The collection demonstrates that issues related to divine foreknowledge touch a wider variety of the different fields within philosophy than might be expected. The authors also vary in their philosophical commitments. Some are compatibilists and some are libertarians. Some are atemporalists and some hold that God is temporal. This diversity strengthens the collection. Third, the quality of each essay is very good. Both open theists and critics of open theism will find much to think about. I highly recommend this work.

Petitionary Prayer: A Philosophical Investigation, by Scott Davison. Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. vi + 189. \$75.00 (hardcover).

KATE FINLEY, Hope College

Scott Davison orients his investigation of petitionary prayer around the following pair of questions: "Assuming that the God of traditional theism exists, is it reasonable to think that God answers specific petitionary prayers? Or are those prayers pointless in the sense that they do not influence God's action?" (7–8). Davison begins by admitting that he originally planned to argue that the answers to those questions are no and yes,



respectively. However, in the course of his investigation he realized he could only defend the much more moderate claim that *some* petitionary prayer is *likely* pointless. I appreciate Davison's clear articulation of both the intentional limitations and modest goals of his investigation. He states many times that he is addressing an "artificial philosopher's question" (8) in that he is examining petitionary prayer only insofar as it is a way to potentially influence God, and in that he is carrying out this examination by focusing exclusively on the overlap between petitionary prayer and various mainstream philosophical issues. This approach enables him to address a wide range of issues lucidly and insightfully. To make sense of the relationships between the many topics that he covers, we can group the chapters into four sections. In the first section (chapters 1 and 2) Davison makes note of important distinctions and definitions, and also presents his main positive account of petitionary prayer. In the second section (chapters 3, 6, 7, and 8) he addresses mainly metaphysical and ethical issues relating to petitionary prayer, and in the third section (chapters 4 and 5) he addresses epistemological issues. Finally, in the fourth section (chapters 9 and 10) he addresses the relationship between faith and prayer as well as some practical reasons in favor of petitionary prayer, in addition to summarizing the rest of the book.

In his first two chapters, Davison presents his account of what petitionary prayers are and what it means for God to answer them. He distinguishes types of petitionary prayer from tokens (those offered by a particular person or group, in a particular time and place) and identifies the three main components of a petitionary prayer: 1) the petitioning subject; 2) the act of requesting (through petitionary prayer); and 3) the object requested. The object requested in a petitionary prayer may be a substance, event, or state of affairs and may be requested for oneself (self-directed petitionary prayer) or someone else (other-directed petitionary prayer). Davison then analyzes what it means for God to answer a petitionary prayer, highlighting three components. God answers *S*'s petitionary prayer requesting *E* iff: 1) God brings about *E* (if not, God at most merely responds to the prayer); 2) God desires to bring about *E* just because *S* prayed for it (note that this desire need not serve as God's *only* reason for bringing about *E*); 3) this desire is an essential component of a "true contrastive explanation" (38) of God's bringing about *E* rather than not (in other words, an explanation of why God brought about *E* would fail if this desire was absent from it). Davison sees this, his Contrastive Reasons Account (CRA), as a middle way between accounts of petitionary prayer that require too much (like counterfactual dependence accounts) and those that require too little (like Pruss's omnirationality account. After establishing his account of petitionary prayer, Davison addresses the following two questions in the remainder of the book: (1) Does this account of petitionary prayer fit with what we believe about God (in particular, what we believe about God's freedom and goodness)? And (2) Can we know that God has answered a particular petitionary prayer of ours?

In chapters 3, 6, 7 and 8, Davison addresses specific versions of the first question. In chapter 3, he focuses on how competing theories of divine freedom might challenge his account of petitionary prayer. After thoroughly evaluating various challenges he concludes that none pose significant problems for the traditional theist. In chapters 6 and 7, he addresses the apparent tension between God's goodness and petitionary prayer: if petitionary prayer is efficacious, God's provision of at least some good things depends on us offering certain petitionary prayers. Most defenses of petitionary prayer argue that some good is significant enough to justify this setup. Davison examines many such defenses and finds most lacking, particularly when applied to cases in which God's provision of *important* goods depends on petitionary prayers. However, he does find responsibility-based defenses of other-directed prayer promising—those that identify increased human responsibility of the sort made possible by petitionary prayer, as a “significant enough” good. In chapter 8, he turns to defenses of self-directed prayer, two of which he finds promising. One is the autonomy defense (a modified version of a defense offered by Stump) of self-directed prayers for permission-required direct divine goods. According to this defense, in order to preserve our autonomy in certain cases, God requires self-directed petitionary prayers before changing things like one's tendency towards sinful behavior. Davison also finds the modified case-by-case defense (versions of which have been offered by Murray, Meyers, and Flint) promising for a limited set of self- and other-directed petitionary prayers. According to this defense, God determines whether to require petitionary prayers on an individual basis rather than according to a general policy. The upshot of these chapters is that there are only a few promising defenses of petitionary prayer, and these defenses are limited in application to specific types of petitionary prayer.

In chapters 4 and 5, Davison engages with the second question mentioned above: whether we can know that God has answered a particular petitionary prayer of ours. He explains that, according to many theistic traditions, we can know both that God, *in general*, answers petitionary prayers, and that God has historically answered *some* particular petitionary prayers; however, this does not settle the question of whether or not *I* can know that God has answered *my* petitionary prayer. In chapter 4, Davison addresses challenges to our ability to have such knowledge, ultimately identifying the safety-based challenge as most worrisome. According to this challenge if I pray for E and God brings about E, I cannot know that God has answered my prayer because there are nearby possible worlds in which God brings about E for reasons independent of my petitionary prayer, but in which I still believe that God has answered my prayer. In this case, the third criterion of Davison's CRA is unfulfilled—I cannot know whether God has answered a particular prayer of mine because I do not know his reasons for bringing something about. In chapter 5, Davison examines particular Christian teachings to determine whether they can

justify our claims to such knowledge—concluding that they cannot. The upshot of these chapters is that, claiming to have “knowledge of specific answered petitionary prayers” is, at best, highly dubious.

In his final two chapters, he briefly addresses additional practical puzzles for, and reasons in favor of, petitionary prayer, as well as interesting connections between faith and petitionary prayer. He also explains that one of the main upshots of this work is that while there are some promising defenses of petitionary prayer, these defenses are limited in scope and have to reckon with many of the pressing challenges he has engaged with throughout the book. Furthermore, he reiterates some of the intentional limitations he imposed on his investigation, which have helped him focus on particular philosophical issues, but also limit the practical implications of his conclusion.

Overall, I find Davison’s investigation compelling; however, I will offer a few friendly suggestions. First, his investigation of petitionary prayer could benefit from a more detailed treatment of what constitutes the object of a petitionary prayer, what components of a petitionary prayer communicate this object, and what qualifies as bringing about the object. Davison does not say much about how to determine the object of a petitionary prayer, instead he seems to assume the object is expressed by some portion of what the petitioner articulates to God while she is praying. This understanding of the object of a prayer seems intuitive, but it does not help us make sense of the cases below. Take the following example of a petitionary prayer and three ways in which God might respond:

Prayer: a person (S) prays for her mother to be healed from an illness (E).

Response A: S’s mother is healed two months after S’s prayer.

Response B: S’s mother suffers intensely for the next thirty years, at which point she is healed. A week after being healed she dies due to unrelated causes.

Response C: S’s mother is never healed.

In responses A and B, God brings about what appears to be the object of S’s prayer, while in response C he does not. If we add the assumption that responses A and B fulfill the second two criteria of Davison’s CRA in addition to the first, then on Davison’s account they both count as answers to S’s prayer. However, there is a sense in which response B does not seem like a true answer to S’s prayer, or at the very least it seems like a clearly worse answer than response A. We can make sense of this difference by adding some intuitively plausible components to the original situation: (1) S prays for E with a sense of urgency, and (2) one of S’s motivations for prayer was her desire for her mother to live a significant portion of the rest of her life in a relatively healthy and minimally painful state. Importantly,

S does not articulate either of these two components as part of her prayer for E. Although these two components seem to make an important difference to how we understand the object S requests and what counts as an answer (or at least a good answer) to S's prayer, it is unclear how they would fit into Davison's account of petitionary prayer. Take another case:

Prayer: a person (S) prays for a job as a teacher (E). S's underlying but unarticulated motivation for this prayer is that she wants to have a job that she finds fulfilling.

Response A: S does not get a job as a teacher but instead gets a job as an artist, which she finds fulfilling.

Response B: S gets a job as a teacher, which she does not find fulfilling.

Again, assuming the second two criteria of his CRA are fulfilled, according to Davison, response B is an answer to S's prayer while response A is not. However, response A seems clearly preferable to, and in some sense a better answer than, response B. Similar to the first case above, in this second case some component (S's motivation) that is not addressed by Davison's account seems to make a crucial difference in which response is preferable, and interestingly, in this case the mere response seems preferable to the answer.

It is important to note that my worry is not primarily about whether we can properly classify certain responses as answers to petitionary prayers—in fact, Davison sees it as a virtue of his account that it does not provide criteria that enables precise classification. Rather, my worry is that because Davison's account is either underspecified or too narrow—in terms of what features of the petitioner or the request itself inform either the object of the prayer and/or what counts as bringing about the object of prayer—it is unclear why we should care (at least as much as Davison thinks we should) about receiving *answers* and having knowledge of *answers* to our prayers. In both cases above, God's answering (according to Davison's account) S's prayer is not what makes the particular response preferable, rather it is the fact that God's response satisfies some additional component (motivation, desire, etc.) either in addition to, or in place of, S's explicit request for the object of her prayer. This is both in tension with what many religious believers think about answers to prayer and seems to undercut (or at least call into question) some of Davison's motivation for focusing on God's answers to our petitionary prayers. Davison may well have a helpful response to this worry—it is just unclear what it would be, based on the level of detail he provides in his account.

Second, Davison's account could also benefit from a clearer articulation of the importance of the particular kind of knowledge that he focuses on—namely, an individual's knowledge that God has answered her particular petitionary prayer. At the end of his epistemological discussion, Davison concludes that I likely cannot *know* whether God has answered my particular petitionary prayer. In later chapters he references this conclusion

in relation to many of the defenses that he addresses, often noting that they suffer because we lack this kind of knowledge. For example, in addressing Stump's defense of petitionary prayer that emphasizes the role that such prayer plays in preventing humans from being either spoiled or overwhelmed by God's provision, Davison claims that Stump's defense relies on an assumption that "created persons know that God has answered their prayers, which is problematic, as we saw in chapters 4 and 5" (134–135). Davison makes a similar point in response to a defense from Frances Howard-Snyder and Daniel Howard-Snyder which focuses on the fact that petitionary prayer enables us to recognize and be grateful to God as the source of good provision. Davison makes the point that this defense is undermined by the fact that "created persons do not typically know that they have received things from God as a result of petitionary prayers" (131).

Although when engaging with some other defenses Davison provides compelling explanations of why knowledge might be required for the goods emphasized therein, and when engaging with at least one defense he notes that the good in question may only require justified belief, when engaging with the defenses above he does neither. Taking into account the fact that traditional theists know both that God, in general, answers petitionary prayers and that God has answered some particular petitionary prayers in the past—it seems plausible that one could rely on this knowledge to believe, quite reasonably, that God has answered their particular petitionary prayers. And it further seems that these beliefs would suffice for bringing about some of the goods Davison claims require knowledge. For example, this belief could easily lead one to be grateful to God. In short, in both examples mentioned above (in addition to others) it is not yet clear from Davison's discussion why the goods mentioned require knowledge that God has answered one's petitionary prayers, rather than belief. Again, Davison may well have a good response to this—if so, his earlier epistemological discussion as well as his discussion of these particular defenses's epistemological issues could benefit from further explanation on this point.

As I mentioned above, these are friendly suggestions for further explanation of concepts that are central to Davison's investigation. *Petitionary Prayer* is a thorough and informative book-length treatment of a subject that is woefully underdiscussed. Davison engages his many interlocutors fairly and carefully, and in so doing gives a comprehensive overview of the current state-of-play of the literature on this topic. Davison emphasizes that he hopes that his "discussion sheds new light on the philosophical issues, leads others to investigate them in further detail, and raises new questions for further study" (6). In this, *Petitionary Prayer* has already succeeded and will surely continue to do so!