

# Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers

---

Volume 37 | Issue 2

Article 1

---

4-1-2020

## How Puzzles of Petitionary Prayer Solve Themselves: Divine Omnirationality, Interest-Relative Explanation, and Answered Prayer

Daniel M. Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy>

---

### Recommended Citation

Johnson, Daniel M. (2020) "How Puzzles of Petitionary Prayer Solve Themselves: Divine Omnirationality, Interest-Relative Explanation, and Answered Prayer," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*: Vol. 37 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

DOI: 10.37977/faithphil.2020.37.2.1

Available at: <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol37/iss2/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers by an authorized editor of ePLACE: preserving, learning, and creative exchange.

# HOW PUZZLES OF PETITIONARY PRAYER SOLVE THEMSELVES: DIVINE OMNIRATIONALITY, INTEREST-RELATIVE EXPLANATION, AND ANSWERED PRAYER

Daniel M. Johnson

Some have seen in the divine attribute of omnirationality, identified by Alexander R. Pruss, the promise of a dissolution of the usual puzzles of petitionary prayer. Scott Davison has challenged this line of thought with a series of example cases. I will argue that Davison is only partially correct, and that the reasons for this reveal an important new way to approach the puzzles of petitionary prayer. Because explanations are typically interest-relative, there is not one correct account of “answered prayer” but many, corresponding to a variety of reasons to care whether God might answer our prayers. It follows from this that the omnirationality solution can be vindicated and that puzzles of petitionary prayer that are not dissolved thereby will typically contain within themselves the seeds of their own solutions.

## 1. Introduction

One of the most interesting and significant contributions to philosophical theology in recent years is Alexander Pruss’s argument that God exhibits a property called *omnirationality*: when God acts, he doesn’t just act on some of the reasons there are for him to do what he does, but on *all* of them. One consequence of this is that it becomes very easy to identify at least some of God’s reasons for acting as he does: if God does Y, and X is a reason for him to do Y, then he did Y at least in part on the basis of X. That matters for a number of debates in philosophical theology. One of them is the debate over petitionary prayer. It turns out that it is easy to identify when God does things at least in part for the reason that I prayed for them: if I genuinely asked for X, and X is a good thing, then my request is a reason for God to bring X about; and so if God actually brings X about, then he did so at least in part on the basis of my request.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>I’ll discuss in a moment the possibility that only certain kinds of requests—perhaps requests with a certain motive, or by people with a certain relationship with or standing before God—generate a reason for God to grant the request, which is more restrictive than what Pruss thinks. Also, another qualification is that Pruss allows that some reasons are



Pruss stops short of claiming that this solves any of the well-known puzzles for the practice of petitionary prayer, and even refrains from claiming that it constitutes an analysis of what it is for God to “answer” prayer, which might contribute to solving the puzzles of petitionary prayer.<sup>2</sup> But these reflections do, at least on their face, seem to suggest a way to dissolve the typical puzzles of petitionary prayer. The usual challenges to the practice of petitionary prayer assume that for petitionary prayer to be successful—to be “answered”—it would need to be able to make the difference as to whether God brings about the object of the request or not.<sup>3</sup> The challenges find various things objectionable about the idea that our requests could make the difference as to whether God does something, the most common of which is based on the thought that a perfect God would do the best thing regardless of whether he is asked. Defenses of petitionary prayer typically share the assumption and simply try to make plausible the idea that prayers could make the difference as to whether God does something.<sup>4</sup> Pruss’s reflections on divine omnirationality suggest a different kind of defense, one that challenges the assumption that for petitionary prayers to be successful, to be “answered,” they have to make the difference as to whether God does what is requested. Perhaps it is enough that our requests make *a* difference in the sense that they are one of God’s reasons for acting, even if they don’t make *the* difference in the sense of constituting a tipping point that takes God from not acting to acting. And omnirationality entails that it is easy for our requests to make *a* difference in that way, because so long as the request actually gives God a reason to act, he acts at least in part on the basis of that request.

So it is unsurprising that some philosophers have seen in Pruss’s reflections on omnirationality the promise of a dissolution of the usual puzzles

---

excluded for God by other reasons he might have; for instance, if he has promised to do something, then he is committed to ignoring (excluding) reasons not to do it. All of the plausible cases of such a thing, however, don’t apply to things God actually does; cases where reasons to do what he actually does are excluded involve some rather unlikely types of promises, or involve a deontic rules like the requirement not to use evil means for good ends which don’t seem to apply to prayers that generate a reason for God to act, and so can be safely ignored for our purposes. See Pruss, “Omnirationality,” 3–4 for discussion.

<sup>2</sup>See Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 34n19.

<sup>3</sup>I will follow Scott Davison in distinguishing between God’s “replying to” a prayer—where the reply might be “no”—and God’s “answering” prayer, which entails that God brought about what was requested, so the answer is “yes.” These can be thought of as two types of answer, but I will follow him in restricting “answer” to the latter type. See Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 10.

<sup>4</sup>The one exception of which I am aware is Cohoe, “God, Causality, and Petitionary Prayer.” His view foreshadows the Pruss-style omnirationality solution to the puzzles of petitionary prayer. This essay goes beyond Cohoe’s solution both in its appeal to interest-relative explanation to handle Davison’s objections to the omnirationality solution and in its treatment of the self-solving character of remaining puzzles of petitionary prayer, but is compatible with the view he defends in that essay. My way of handling Davison’s cases differs from his later attempt to do so (in Cohoe, “How Could Prayer Make a Difference?”), and in fact I disagree with his way of doing so, though I don’t think my response is incompatible with his.

of petitionary prayer.<sup>5</sup> Scott Davison challenges this line of thought. He argues, using a series of example cases, that even if Pruss's reflections about omnirationality are correct and prayers automatically enter into God's reasons for bringing about the object of the prayer, that fact is not sufficient to make it true that God *answers* those prayers when he brings about their object. In short, he argues that the assumption underlying the usual puzzles of petitionary prayer is correct: for a prayer to be successful, to be "answered," it must in some way make *the* difference, or constitute the tipping point, for God to act as he does.<sup>6</sup>

I will argue that Davison is only partially correct, and that the reasons for this reveal an important new way to approach the puzzles of petitionary prayer. In the first section, I will argue Davison's cases do indicate an underlying gap between the truth of divine omnirationality and the question of whether God answered a prayer that is based on the fact that explanation is often interest-relative. The answer to the question of whether God did something *because* I asked depends in part on my interest in asking the question. There is not one answer but many, corresponding with many different interests that might be reflected in the question. Therefore Davison is right that it does not follow from divine omnirationality that the answer to the question "did God answer my prayer?" when God did what I asked is always *yes*. However, I will argue in the second section, there is at least *one* sense of "answered prayer," corresponding to one legitimate interest we have in asking whether God is answering our prayers, according to which divine omnirationality *does* entail that when we've asked for something good and God brings it about, God has answered our prayer. In other words, there is at least one sense of "answered prayer" which does not require the stronger difference-making view of "answered prayer," and which therefore escapes the usual puzzles of petitionary prayer. Finally, in the third section, I will discuss senses of "answered prayer" which do require that the prayer "makes the difference" in some stronger sense. I will argue that the debate over these looks quite different in light of divine omnirationality. I will argue that most ways of raising a puzzle of petitionary prayer will contain within themselves the seed of a solution to the puzzle—they will, in an important

---

<sup>5</sup>Contributing to the attractiveness of this line of thought is its relatively low cost in terms of metaphysical commitments. It doesn't seem to carry any beyond the commitments of omnirationality itself. Notably, it doesn't carry a commitment to libertarian views of the will, and so it seems to dissolve the problems of petitionary prayer for theological determinism just as easily as for any other view of divine providence, which may surprise those who have thought the puzzles of petitionary prayer especially intractable for theological determinists. For a theologically determinist use of omnirationality to solve the puzzles of petitionary prayer, see Heath White, *Fate and Free Will*, 33–36. Relatedly, this line of thought could be thought of as one way of defending Thomas Aquinas's account of answered prayer, which is criticized both by Stump in "Petitionary Prayer," 86 and by Smith and Yip in "Partnership with God," 397–399.

<sup>6</sup>He has his own gloss on difference-making; he rejects the common counterfactual characterization of that idea in favor of a contrastive-reasons account. I'll return to that later.

way, be self-solving—and that it is therefore very unlikely that a puzzle of petitionary prayer will constitute a serious general problem for the practice of petitioning God.

One clarification is in order. There are two parts to the omnirationality solution to the puzzles of petitionary prayer. The first part is just the claim that a prayer generates a reason for God to grant the request. The second part is the application of omnirationality itself: the claim that, if a prayer generates a reason for God to grant the request, then when God grants the request, he does it in part because of that reason. The second part is the key to solving the puzzles of petitionary prayer, because it is the gap between (a) a prayer giving God a reason to act and (b) God acting because of the prayer that is the target of the puzzles of petitionary prayer—which, generally speaking, argue that God would have done what we asked anyway, or that for all we know God would have done what we asked anyway.<sup>7</sup> It is the second part that Davison challenges with his objections. Because of that, I will remain neutral on certain debates about the first part of the solution. Specifically, Pruss thinks that any request directed to God for something good generates a reason for God to grant the request, while Cohoe thinks that only requests made under certain conditions (those made “for an appropriate object . . . in a suitable sort of manner,” and which “fit with the nature of the relationship”) generate a reason for God to grant the request.<sup>8</sup> Regardless of who is correct here—and, frankly, I’m unsure myself—the basic structure of the omnirationality solution to the puzzles of petitionary prayer will remain unchanged.<sup>9</sup> In discussing the omnirationality solution in the rest of the essay, I will try to refer to “prayers which generate a reason for God to grant the request” or some such formulation, so as to remain mostly neutral as to which conditions must be met for such a thing to occur.

---

<sup>7</sup>This is true even of Davison’s epistemic puzzle of petitionary prayer; see Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup>Cohoe, “God, Causality, and Petitionary Prayer,” 36.

<sup>9</sup>To elaborate on this point: suppose that there are pretty restrictive conditions on whether a request of God generates a reason for God to grant it; suppose that only requests from Christians (via the mediation of Jesus Christ) done respectfully and for pure motives give God a reason to act. In that case—assuming the rest of the omnirationality solution works—the general puzzles of petitionary prayer are still defeated. I think the puzzles of petitionary prayer are supposed to be challenges to the religious practice of petitioning God *in general*, not just challenges to this or that petition. If the puzzles are solved under some conditions involving the attitudes of the petitioners, it is open to religious practitioners to strive to meet the conditions under which their prayers will be answered, and so the practice in general survives the puzzles. Now, the question of what conditions must be met for a request to generate a reason for God to act is still an interesting and very important question, but I think it is a distinct debate from the one that has up until now been conducted under the heading “the puzzles of petitionary prayer.” It is a debate that can be had among religious practitioners as to how to petition God most effectively, rather than a debate about whether the whole practice is misguided.

## 2. *The Gap Between Omnirationality and Answered Prayer*

For God to answer my prayer is for God to bring about something because I prayed for it. Some clarifications are in order, but putting those to the side, the important element for our purposes is the “because,” the explanatory relationship.<sup>10</sup> Pruss thinks, and Davison agrees (at least for the sake of argument), that because of divine omnirationality any prayer that gives God a reason to do *X* is one of the reasons that God acts on when doing *X*. Davison just doesn’t think that is sufficient for saying “God did *X* because I prayed for *X*.” Davison gives three cases where people are aware of a reason *Y* (given by someone’s request) for doing *X*, and the reason features into their decision, but nevertheless it seems wrong to say that they did *X* because of *Y*. What follows are brief summaries of each case.<sup>11</sup>

*Tree-trimming.* Imagine that my neighbor asks me to trim a tree on my property that hangs over his. Suppose his request matters a lot to me; I want to keep him happy. I also wanted to trim my tree to make it look better, but his request gives me a new reason at least as strong to trim the tree. I trim the tree; it seems proper to say that I did it because he asked me. But now imagine a variation: he asked me to trim the tree, but I am almost totally indifferent to his request. His request does give me a very slight reason to trim the tree, but I was going to do it anyway, and his reason plays hardly any role in my motivation. In that case, it is odd to say that I trimmed my tree because he asked me, despite the fact that his request did play, very slightly, into my motivational structure.

*Letter to the mayor.* A mayor of a city decides to repeal a city tax, mostly for reasons connected to the general good of the city. The tax has all sorts of bad effects, which vastly outweigh the good that it does. The mayor also receives a letter from a citizen requesting that the tax be repealed because of its bad effects on that citizen personally. The mayor does care about that citizen and gives the request some weight, but the weight is vanishingly small, and the mayor certainly would have repealed the tax whether the citizen had asked or not. In that case, it seems odd to say that the mayor repealed the tax because the citizen asked.

*Divine conservation.* This case is brief enough to quote the relevant section: “Finally, suppose that God has a million strong reasons to sustain in existence the current world, the world in which you and I exist right now. Imagine that I pray that God would continue to sustain in existence this current world for the next five minutes, and that God does so. Should we say that God has answered my prayer? Had I not prayed, the incomplete, weighted list of all of God’s million strong reasons for sustaining in existence the current world would have remained unchanged (although the

---

<sup>10</sup>One clarification is that I agree with Davison’s insistence that for God’s action to count as answering the prayer, it must be a response to the content of the prayer and not merely to the external circumstances in which the prayer is uttered, which clarifies the “because I prayed for it” clause. Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 31.

<sup>11</sup>The cases appear in Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 34–37.

complete list of all of God's reasons would have changed, if Pruss is right). Since my prayer carries virtually no weight in God's decision to sustain in existence this current world over the past five minutes, we should not say that God has answered it, contrary to Pruss—his account requires too little."<sup>12</sup>

It does seem to me that at least some of these cases are instances where it is wrong to say that someone "did X because of Y," despite the fact that Y featured among that person's reasons for doing X. (I will discuss the reservations I have about some of the cases in more detail in the next section.) That is a strange phenomenon. What's going on here? I offer the following explanation.

I take it that this phenomenon is caught up with the interest-relativity of explanation—of "why" questions and "because" statements. This applies to all sorts of different types of explanation, including causal explanations, final explanations in terms of reasons (which is the type relevant here), and what I have elsewhere called "ontological" explanations, explanations of what something is or of what it is for something to be the case.<sup>13</sup> With each of these types of explanation, it seems that there is one interest-independent explanation: the full or complete explanation. In the case of causal explanation of a proposition reporting an event, the full explanation would have to cite every factor in that event's causal history; in the case of explanation in terms of reasons, the full explanation would have to cite every reason the agent had for taking the action; and so on. This full explanation seems to be objective and independent of anyone's interests.

However, the full explanation of just about anything is unavailable to us, and mostly uninteresting in any case. That is why any given "why" question might be asked in a certain context or with a certain interest, which makes some aspects of the "full and ultimate" explanation relevant and others irrelevant. The context and the inquirer's interests allow certain partial and non-ultimate explanations to stand in as a satisfactory answer to the "why" question, while disallowing others. For example, suppose that I decide to go to Little Caesars to pick up pizza for my family for dinner. The three-year-old asks "why are you going to Little Caesars?" and the six-year-old adds, "yeah, why are you going to Little Caesars?" I know what the six-year-old wants to know—he loves the cheese sticks at Papa John's—and so I say "because Little Caesars is cheap." The three-year-old looks confused; he says "but I want to wrestle!" I realize what he's asking, and give him a different answer: "I'm going because it is time for dinner and we're all hungry." What has happened is that two different aspects of the full explanation of why I am going where I am are relevant because of the different interests of the inquirers. The answer that satisfies one won't satisfy the other; what counts as a good explanation in the one context doesn't count as a good explanation in the other.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup>Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 37.

<sup>13</sup>See, for example, Johnson, "B-theory Old and New."

<sup>14</sup>Bas van Fraassen pointed out the interest-relativity of explanation in *The Scientific Image*.

So Pruss's thesis about omnirationality may be exactly right when we are talking about full or ultimate explanation—any prayer for X that constitutes a reason for God to do X is part of the full and ultimate explanation of why he does X. Thus in the interest-independent sense of “because,” anytime God does what someone asks (when their request gives him a reason to do it), he does it in part because they asked. But Davison may well be correct as well: it doesn't follow that in every such situation it is right to say that “God did X because you asked him to.” And some of Davison's cases are perhaps good illustrations of this: they seem to be cases where only certain aspects of the full explanation are relevant, and where we seem to want to identify some stronger “difference-making” sense in which God did something because we asked.

This seems a blow to anyone hoping to use Pruss's theses about divine omnirationality to dissolve the puzzles of petitionary prayer. But I think there is still hope for that project. Davison concludes on the basis of his cases that Y merely entering into one's reasons for doing X is not sufficient for doing X because of Y. He infers that there must be some stronger criterion for doing X because of Y which captures the stronger sense in which Y must somehow make the difference as to whether X is done. He (rightly, in my view) rejects the usual counterfactual test, according to which God did X because of request Y if he wouldn't have done X unless request Y had been made. He offers in its place a new contrastive-reasons account, according to which God does X because of request Y if Y plays an essential role in a true contrastive explanation of why God did X rather than something else.<sup>15</sup>

What concerns me about this pattern of reasoning isn't the details of the contrastive-reasons account of answered prayer; what concerns me is the fact that Davison landed on any restrictive interest-independent account of answered prayer at all. That, it seems to me, is not the lesson to be learned from Davison's cases, if my explanation of why they succeed is accurate. Given that the thesis of divine omnirationality is true, the only interest-independent sort of explanation available entails that anyone's requests which generate a reason for God to grant them do indeed form part of why God does what is requested. If there are cases on which God did what was requested but it is nevertheless wrong to say that God answered a prayer that generated a reason for him to grant the request, then it must be because the context and the interests of the inquirer make it so the prayer is not a *relevant* answer to the why-question. But why think there would only be one set of interests or one context, such that a restrictive difference-making account of answered prayer would *always* be true? Perhaps there are many interests we might have in asking whether God has done what he did in response to our prayers, which would then generate many different senses in which it might be said that God answers prayer. And if so, perhaps there is at least one sense of “answered prayer”

---

<sup>15</sup>This summarizes the argument of Chapter 2 of Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 24–42.



—one interest we might have in asking “did God do that because of my prayer?”—according to which the most permissive answer that is allowed by divine omnirationality is in fact a relevant answer.

### 3. *The Value Question*

So far I’ve suggested the following. If the thesis of divine omnirationality is true, then a full explanation of God’s actions will involve reference to our requests that generate reasons for God to grant them, such that God brought those things about in part because we asked. This full explanation is the only interest-independent explanation available. The question “why did God do that?” may nevertheless be asked in contexts and with interests that would render a reference to my prayer for what he did irrelevant, and so it would be false to say in that context that God answered my prayer or did it because I asked him to. We may have a variety of reasons that we care to inquire as to whether God did what he did in response to our requests, and so there will be a corresponding variety of senses of “answered prayer.”

If our goal is to try to figure out what is meant most often by “answered prayer,” we could look (as Davison does) at a series of cases and try to generalize from them. But I suggest that a more helpful approach would be to look directly at the factor that is deciding the different senses of “answered prayer”: the interests we have in asking whether God acted because of our requests. Once we realize that “answered prayer,” due to the “because” concept embedded in it, is interest-relative, it would make sense to immediately make the same kind of move that value-driven epistemologists do.<sup>16</sup> Instead of assuming we’re clear in our own minds about what “answered prayer” is in any given case and consulting our intuitions about cases, we instead ask: why should we care whether our prayers are answered? What kinds of relationships between our requests and God’s actions *matter*, and why? It may be that there is more than one kind of relationship between my requests and God’s actions that matters—and so there may be more than one important sense of “answered prayer.”

I want to pursue this value-driven approach to the question of answered prayer in the remainder of the essay. In this section, I want to identify a type of relationship between our requests and God’s actions which *matters*—that is, which is a legitimate focus of our interest—and which, in combination with divine omnirationality, licenses the easy answer to the question of whether God answers prayer that dissolves the typical puzzles of petitionary prayer.

One major good of prayer is that it allows God to involve us in what he is doing. Call this the good of *involvement* in God’s activities. He’s the primary agent; the projects are his. But he dignifies us when he involves us in those projects, which he of course (typically) could do without us.

---

<sup>16</sup>For an example of value-driven epistemology, see Kvanvig, *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*.

In other words, even if I'm an invalid stuck in my house, I want to be a part of what God is doing in the world, however small my part is.<sup>17</sup> If that is my interest, then what matters is not whether my prayer "made the difference"; what matters is that God took what I asked him into account, that I got to be "part of the team," even if God didn't need me on the team. But then all I need to know is that my request was part of the reason he did what he did—it doesn't matter how small a part, or even if he had conclusive reason to do it independently of my request. I got to be a part of what he did; my request gave him a reason, and he took that reason into account when he acted. So if this is my interest in asking whether God answered my prayer, the answer is basically the broadest one that divine omnirationality allows: if you asked for it in such a way that it gave God a reason to grant the request, and God did it, then God did it in part because you asked, and therefore God answered your prayer.<sup>18</sup>

There are common examples where this sort of involvement is all we want, and we think it matters enough that answers to "why" questions track it. All the examples I can think of have something to do with collective action or at least the actions involving groups of people (naturally enough, since the good in question is involvement in the activity of others, namely God's activity). One sort of collective action is political action. Consider voting for president. Given the population of the United States, your vote never comes even close to "making the difference" as to who is elected. And some of our "because" statements track that fact: we can make sense of me saying to you "your vote for this president isn't why he was elected" under some circumstances, namely those where what matters is if you could have done something to avoid the outcome. But we can also make sense of me saying to you "this president is there in part because of you" in other circumstances, namely those where your mere involvement is what matters. (These situations can be either positive or negative—we could be assigning either credit or blame, or encouraging either celebration or repentance).

---

<sup>17</sup>Heath White, in his treatment of theological determinism and petitionary prayer, picks out what is, as far as I can tell, basically this good of involvement when he says that God gives those whose prayers he answers "the dignity of causality" (in Pascal's phrase), giving us "the privilege of being part of the solution to the world's ills in a special way." White, *Fate and Free Will*, 36. It is also plausible to interpret Cohoe, in "God, Causality, and Petitionary Prayer," 30, as picking this good out when he speaks of the good of "contributing to the good of other created beings," especially once he makes it clear later in the essay that such contribution doesn't require that your requests "make the difference" as to whether God does what you request. What is original about my treatment is not the good I'm pointing out, but the way in which this particular good interacts with interest-relative explanation and omnirationality.

<sup>18</sup>I think Cohoe, in "God, Causality, and Petitionary Prayer," 40, identifies another good that would probably have the same result with respect to omnirationality as the good of involvement: the good of friendship (or perhaps a broader category of relationship), which leads us to care about whether God takes our requests into account when he acts. If we ask "did God do X because I asked?" with that good of friendship primarily in mind, I suspect the mere fact that he took our request into account would be sufficient for the answer to be "yes." So there are probably other goods than involvement which could be used to make my point.

Or consider being a part of a large movement advocating for some important political change, or being a part of a large-scale rescue effort in response to a natural disaster. Perhaps all you do (perhaps all you can do) is bring coffee and a few words of encouragement to the protesters, the lobbyists, the rescue workers, or whoever is more directly involved in the effort, out of a desire to be a part of the movement and see it succeed. It may well be true that the movement's success did not depend on your contributions; they would have been easily replaced, or just as likely the movement would have succeeded even without replacements for those particular sorts of contributions. Again, sometimes it makes sense to say that that change wasn't made (or those people weren't rescued) because of you, such as when you are trying to position yourself as some kind of hero. But other times it does make sense to say that the change was made, or the people rescued, because of you. For example, when it comes time to participate in celebrations of what was accomplished, or when the people benefitted thank those who contributed, it can be accurate for you to think to yourself "this is something *we* did," and include yourself in that "*we*."

Another class of examples is team sports. Consider the contribution of individual members of, say, a basketball or football team to the whole. Often the individual members's contributions don't make the difference, and the best contrastive explanations don't refer to them. I scored four points and got one rebound in five minutes of action; we won by 25. Or maybe I didn't get into the game at all but only played on the scout team in practice, preparing the team's starters by running the opposing team's plays; and perhaps the team even would have won without that sort of preparation. But still in some very important sense, *I was a part* of our victory.<sup>19</sup> In one sense, we didn't win because of me, and you should tell me that if I start boasting. In another sense, we won, in part, because of my contributions, which you should tell me when I am feeling left out of the team's accomplishment.

There are cases of petitionary prayer that are hard to make sense of without this less restrictive sense of answered prayer. One, unsurprisingly, is collective prayer, since it makes the connection to collective action explicit, and therefore brings the good of *involvement* in the projects of others—projects that could and would succeed without your contribution—to the forefront. In the Abrahamic traditions, God is thought to answer not only the prayers of individuals but the prayers of groups, of nations

---

<sup>19</sup>If my memory serves me correctly, San Antonio Spurs coach Greg Popovich, in his speech to his team in the locker room following their victory in the 2014 NBA finals, made the point that everyone in the organization "had a piece of this," and he meant to include even those (like assistant trainers and student interns and the like) in the organization who didn't directly impact the victory and without whom the victory would still have been won. But because they were a part of the effort, they "had a piece" of it. I think this is deeply right, and an excellent example of the good of involvement that I'm pointing out.

and peoples.<sup>20</sup> If that is true, then God answers collective prayer, and it would be accurate for members of those groups to believe that God had answered their prayers. But very likely their individual prayers would not count as having been answered if we apply a strong “difference-making” criterion like the counterfactual test or Davison’s contrastive-reasons account. If God is responding to the prayers of a whole nation, probably no one person’s praying or failing to pray made the difference, such that God wouldn’t have granted the request without that prayer, or such that the prayer is an essential part of a true contrastive explanation of why God did what he did rather than something else. The account I’ve outlined has no such trouble: if what you care about is just *being involved*—which is likely already the case, since this is already an example of collective action even before we bring God into it—it would be true for you to say that your prayers have been answered because the fact that they are one reason for God’s action is sufficient to make you involved in that way.<sup>21</sup>

Another case of petitionary prayer that is hard to make sense of without this less restrictive sense of answered prayer is prayer for things which God has already promised to bring about.<sup>22</sup> Eleonore Stump’s seminal article that began the contemporary debate over petitionary prayer actually began specifically with the Lord’s Prayer, and focused on the first few petitions which, strikingly, seem to be things that God has already promised to bring about.<sup>23</sup> These pose a problem that is deeper than the standard problem for any petitionary prayer, the worry that “if it was good enough to do, God would have done it anyway.” That puzzle can be solved by identifying difference-making prayer. But in the first part of the Lord’s Prayer, we find God commanding people to pray for things he seems committed to bringing about anyway, because he has already promised to bring them about. The “prayer can make the difference” response is a less plausible take on these petitions. But divine omnirationality and the good of involvement can yield a plausible account of what is going on

---

<sup>20</sup>God deals collectively with groups and with humanity as a whole all through the Bible. For some specific examples, see Exodus 3:19 and the many examples of God’s responding to national repentance and answering collective prayers for forgiveness and mercy in the books of Judges, Daniel, and Nehemiah. (Thanks to Jay Bruce and Nick Meriwether for these suggestions.)

<sup>21</sup>Davison explicitly and carefully limits his account of answered prayer to individual rather than collective prayer, and so I am not so much objecting here directly to his account of answered prayer as showing its limitation. The contrastive-reasons and counterfactual tests for answered prayer seem built with individual prayer in mind and falter when applied to cases of collective prayer. I think what this discussion helps us to see is that this limitation actually interferes with our understanding even of individual prayer. One possible lesson here is that many of the sorts of things that should be said about collective prayer can be said even of individual prayer, since individual prayer to God asking him to do something in the world is either a kind of collective action with God or at least analogous to collective action with God.

<sup>22</sup>The inspiration for this line of argument is Heath White’s discussion in *Fate and Free Will*, 33–36.

<sup>23</sup>Stump, “Petitionary Prayer.”

here: God is commanding us to pray for things he already has a decisive reason to do (which are his greatest works, long promised), so that he can involve us in his doing of them.

Now we can revisit Davison's cases with this good of *involvement* in mind and the corresponding sense of "answered prayer." As it turns out, the original intuition on one of the cases can be explained from this perspective, the second case is underdescribed, and I am simply willing to reject the original verdict on the third case (again, so long as the good of involvement is kept in mind).

*Tree-trimming.* In the tree-trimming case where my neighbor's request gave me only a very small reason to trim the tree, my neighbor and I probably shouldn't care enough about each other's yard-care projects to regard mere involvement in them, even if we just have a tiny role, as worth desiring. So the fact that the neighbor's request plays such a small role in my decision to trim the tree does mean that I shouldn't care about that part of the explanation of the tree-trimming action. So there is no important sense in which I trimmed the tree because of his request, because the good of involvement isn't significant enough to make such a small explanatory role for his request relevant to note.

Now, we could adjust the example so that the good of involvement would become a larger good, and in that case I think our intuition might change if we keep that good in mind. One way would be to involve teammates or family members, like imagining my small son asking me to trim it, because he wants to be a part of my life and a part of taking care of our home. In that case, then perhaps the fact that I did take my son's request into account, even if I gave it small weight, should be something he should care about, and so it may be true for him to believe that in *that* sense I did it in part because he asked.

*Letter to the mayor.* The case of the letter to the mayor, it turns out, is underdescribed. It doesn't have enough information about the context—in particular, about why we care whether the mayor passed the law because of the letter. Here are a few different ways of spelling it out. (1) We're engaged in a corruption investigation, and the letter was from a (minor) political donor. We want to find out whether the mayor is beholden to his financial supporters, or whether he is acting for the public interest. In this case, the fact that the letter from the donor played such a minor role in the mayor's motivational structure allows him to say truly "I didn't pass the law because of the letter; I did it for the public good." (2) We're engaged in an inquiry as to the character of the mayor. Perhaps the mayor is appearing before God in the final judgment; or perhaps he is being examined by a pastor or spiritual advisor interested in the state of his soul, and the mayor is doing some soul-searching. The letter was from a good man down on his luck. We want to find out if the mayor cares properly about individual people, and so we want to know if he gave the letter some weight when deciding what to do. In this case, so long as the letter did form some part (even a very small part) of his motivation, the mayor can say truly "yes,

to a certain extent I did pass the law because of the letter." This second variation on the case gets close to focusing on the good of involvement I mentioned: if it is the letter-writer who is asking, the letter-writer might want to know in order to know whether the mayor cares enough about him or respects him enough that his words carried weight with the mayor.

Notice that these two descriptions are compatible with one another and so could describe the very same case. The different interests of the inquirers make different aspects of the full explanation relevant. In the first variant, the interest in discovering corruption makes the fact that the mayor was going to sign the law anyway the relevant explanatory feature; in the second variant, the interest in searching the mayor's soul for compassion for individuals makes the fact that the letter did have some impact, even if small and not enough to make the difference as to which action is ultimately taken, the relevant explanatory feature.

*Divine conservation.* This is the case where I'm willing to deny the original intuition. As I've been arguing, we need to understand why we care whether God has answered our prayers that he would continue to sustain the world. If it is because we want to bear a heavy sort of responsibility for the sustenance of the world, then it would need to be true that our request made the difference as to whether God continues to sustain the world, and of course that isn't true. So if that is our interest, then certainly God did not answer our prayer. But if I keep the good of *involvement* clearly in mind, I lose my intuition that God couldn't have continued to sustain the world because of my prayer that he do so. Why can't I be involved in that way in his sustenance of the world? Suppose I'm moving a heavy piece of furniture, and I allow my three-year-old son to help (yes, I know, disregard the safety concerns), by holding one corner with all of his strength. His strength isn't enough to make a difference one way or the other; the furniture doesn't so much as move when he loses his balance and removes his hands. Nevertheless, he is involved in the moving of the furniture, and it is legitimately important to him that he is. We could even modify this case to make all the causal influence run through me and my reasons to act: suppose the way he helps is by cheering me on (that's safer). Even though I'm plenty motivated to move the furniture even without his cheers, if his cheers do motivate me even a little bit, he is involved in the moving of the furniture. And it makes sense to say that the furniture was moved in part because of him. Now, it seems to me that it isn't so implausible that I can be involved even in the great divine act of sustaining the creation in that sort of way with my prayers. So when I have the *involvement* good clearly in my mind, I lose my intuition that God's sustenance of the world is not an answer to my prayer to that effect. That's just a way in which an omniscient God can involve me even in his greatest works. (And, in fact, this is exactly what he's doing in commanding me to pray the first few petitions of the Lord's Prayer.) That's a spine-chilling, remarkable theological consequence, not an objection.

I conclude that there is at least one way around the puzzles of petitionary prayer. If the good of involvement with God's activities is what is kept in mind when considering whether God answers prayer, then omnirationality allows us to conclude that whenever God brings about something that we prayed for (meeting whatever conditions are necessary to give him a reason to do it), he did it in part in answer to our prayer. To achieve this good of involvement, there is no need for prayer to "make the difference" in the strong sense that the prayer constitutes a tipping point that makes the difference between whether God does what is requested or not; it is enough that our prayer makes *a* difference in the sense that it constitutes one of the reasons on the basis of which he acts. When considering prayer from the perspective of this good and the thesis of divine omnirationality, the standard puzzles of petitionary prayer dissolve.

A question may occur at this point to those familiar with the debate over petitionary prayer: how is the good that I've named *involvement* relate to the good of *responsibility* to which many have appealed in order to solve the puzzles of petitionary prayer? Does this line of thought ultimately belong to the family of responsibility-based defenses against the puzzle of petitionary prayer?<sup>24</sup> My answer is: I don't quite know. I have two things to say about this. First, there is clearly one tremendous difference between the defense I've outlined and all the extant members of the family of responsibility-based defenses: those defenses have all tried to argue that the good of the extension of responsibility requires that our requests "make the difference" in the strong sense as to whether God does what is requested, and have tried to argue that it is a sufficiently great good that it gives God reason to act differently depending on whether he is petitioned or not. All of the objections to responsibility-based defenses have targeted this feature. Since I have not said that the good of involvement requires that our requests make the difference—in fact, I have said the opposite—the debate over responsibility-based defenses is basically irrelevant to discussion of this one.

Second, I don't know what the relationship is between the good that I've pointed out—involvement—and responsibility. One might wonder if I am actually disagreeing with responsibility-based defenses by virtue of my claim that the good of involvement does *not* require that our requests "make the difference" as to what God does. That would only be so, though, if the good of involvement essentially involved the sort of responsibility that has been appealed to in the literature. I do not claim that it does, and I do not know whether it does. I have picked out the good of involvement not by giving an account of it but by ostension—that is, by using examples to *point* it out. I've not given an analysis of it, a set of conditions both necessary and sufficient for it, because I do not know what those may be. It does seem to me from the examples I've used that the good of

---

<sup>24</sup>For a summary discussion of this family of responses, see Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, Chapter 7.

involvement is somehow connected to some sort or degree of responsibility, but I do not know how it is connected (whether the connection is essential or of some other sort) or to what sort or degree of responsibility it is connected. All of that, it seems to me, implies that I am pursuing a line of thought quite different than the responsibility-based defenses that have so far been tried, and I will leave off further investigation of the relationship between responsibility and the good I have called involvement.<sup>25</sup>

#### *4. Other Interests and the Puzzles of Petitionary Prayer*

I have concluded that there is at least one way around the puzzles of petitionary prayer. This is not to say that all the puzzles of petitionary prayer, or even any of the standard puzzles, have been fully solved. Here's why. You need to have a motive for wanting to know whether God might answer your (or someone else's) prayer. This motive provides the context for determining the meaning of "because" in the question "might God do this because I ask him?" In other words, when you ask, "might God answer this prayer?" the proper response must be something along the lines of "well, why do you want to know?" If you have no particular motive for asking the question—no sense for why you would want to know whether God might answer your prayer—then the question has no answer, because the question has no determinate meaning. There isn't enough context to determine the meaning of the term "because" in the question "might God do this because I asked?" In that case, it might be proper simply to deny that the question has an answer at all, or it might be proper to default to the only context-independent sort of explanation, full or complete explanation. In that case, it is the answer implied by divine omnirationality that is appropriate—if your prayer plays any role at all in God's reasons for acting, then he did what he did in part because you asked.

However, if you have a more particular motive for asking the question, then (and only then) might a puzzle of petitionary prayer arise, one which might not be solved by omnirationality. After all, I think the success of Davison's examples do show that we often have other interests in mind than the good of involvement when we want to know whether someone might respond to our requests, and it is plausible that some of those interests will apply when we want to know whether God might respond to our

---

<sup>25</sup>The very same two points apply to the defense given by Smith and Yip in "Partnership with God," though it is more tempting in their case to simply disagree with them that "partnership with God" requires that our requests "make the difference" in a strong sense as to whether God does what we ask. It may be that a kind of partnership with God could be built on the good of involvement that I've pointed out, in which case Smith and Yip would be wrong to say that God would have to withhold goods unless asked in order to enable that sort of partnership. I'll leave that question undecided. If they are right that "partnership with God" does require stronger difference-making, then they are picking out a different good than I am; if they are wrong, they could be picking out a good that could be constructed from the good of involvement (it would have to add the extra vows of partnership they think are important for the kind of partnership they are talking about).



requests. And it may well be that some of those interests would require our requests to “make the difference” in a stronger sense in order for it to turn out to be true that God did what we asked because of our requests.

It is tempting to say at this point that it is one’s motives in offering prayers which raise puzzles of petitionary prayer. But it isn’t directly the motive one has in offering the prayer that raises the puzzle. It is the motive one has for caring whether God might answer one’s prayer. These are not automatically equivalent. One might have a motive for offering a prayer that doesn’t have to do with wanting it answered: one might be praying in obedience to a command, for instance. But the two are connected: if you have a reason to care about whether God might answer your prayer, that will often be one of the reasons you offer the prayer (because you want God to answer it, for that reason). But even this connection is not essential: you might have a well-worked out theory about why you should want God to answer your prayers, but then find yourself praying in ways that don’t really fit your theory or which aren’t actually motivated by your theory. So I will sometimes refer to motives we have in offering prayers to God, but what is really doing the work (to set the meaning of the term “because” in the question “might God do this because I ask him?” and to raise a puzzle of petitionary prayer) is the motives we have to care whether God might answer our prayers.

Here are just a couple of possible reasons we might have to care about whether God might answer our prayers:

- (a) The reason I care about whether God might answer my prayer is that if God wasn’t going to do what I asked anyway, I want him to change his mind and do what I’m asking. I want his priorities to move closer to mine.
- (b) The reason I care whether God might answer my prayer is that I want to take responsibility in a deeper sort of way for what happens in my world, and I think that’s possible if my prayers might make the difference as to what he does. I don’t just want to be involved in what God was going to do anyway; I want to take a heavier burden of personal responsibility for, say, my neighbor’s well-being and for other things that happen in the world. I want to graduate from child to something like a co-regent with or sub-ruler under God of the world.<sup>26</sup>
- (c) The reason I care whether God might answer my prayer is that I want a real friendship with God, and I think that may require for me to have some real autonomy in deciding what I want him to give me, so that God doesn’t overwhelm me by forcing his own will on me or turn into my personal cosmic vending machine.

We could go on. If any of these reasons for caring about whether God might answer our prayers are legitimate, then they raise the puzzles of

---

<sup>26</sup>This may sound theologically objectionable to some, but it seems to me there is plenty of theological justification for this sort of attitude, at least in the Jewish and Christian traditions. The best literary representation of which I know of this idea that humans can and ought to think of themselves as rulers under God can be found in the scenes near the end of C.S. Lewis’s *Perelandra*.

petitionary prayer. If any of these are your interest in asking the question “might God answer my prayer?” then your prayer probably *would* have to “make the difference” in some strong sense as to whether God did what you asked for your prayer to count as answered. And then it makes sense to ask why God wouldn’t just do the best thing whether or not he is asked. Divine omnirationality, therefore, doesn’t dissolve the puzzles of petitionary prayer which are raised by these (and other) interests people have in bringing petitionary prayers to God.

I’m not going to evaluate each of these reasons to care about whether God answers your prayers. I will argue, however, that the debate over the puzzles for petitionary prayer that are raised by these reasons for caring whether God might answer prayer looks very different in light of divine omnirationality. It is a much less significant threat to the widespread religious practice of offering petitionary prayers.

To begin, notice that these descriptions of reasons to care about whether God answers your prayers correspond to standard defenses against the puzzle of petitionary prayer. The first one I listed corresponds very closely to the solution to the puzzle of petitionary prayer offered by Martin Pickup; his idea is that God doesn’t actually have requiring reasons to make the best world that he can, and so our prayers might actually give him reason to make our world better than it would otherwise have been.<sup>27</sup> The second corresponds to the responsibility-based defenses that are common.<sup>28</sup> The third corresponds to Eleonore Stump’s original solution to the puzzle of petitionary prayer.<sup>29</sup> There is a reason for this correspondence: if there is a relationship between your requests and God’s actions that you have a good reason to care about, then that is something God has a reason to care about as well.

In other words, if we approach the question of answered prayer in the value-based way I’ve suggested that takes divine omnirationality into account, then the puzzles of petitionary prayer take on a kind of

---

<sup>27</sup>This is an oversimplification. To elaborate a bit: Pickup gives a few different reasons to think God isn’t obligated to make the best overall world he can, so that our prayers could influence him to create a world that is better in some respect. One has to do with the possibility of things of incommensurable value, another with the fact that God’s ethics may not require him to create the best overall world. One of the sources he cites is Mark Murphy’s discussion of God’s ethics, whose idea is that created things aren’t actually intrinsically good in the strongest sense, but have their goodness by “participation,” that is, by virtue of some relation to God. So creation doesn’t actually add any goodness over and above that which exists in God. Therefore, no matter how God creates the world, there won’t be more or less “total goodness” considered absolutely, which means that God doesn’t have a requiring reason to create the world one way rather than another, or to create rather than not to create. This may allow our prayers to give God extra reason to make the world “better” at least in the sense of having more participated goodness in it (which is not the same as having “more goodness” in absolute terms). See Pickup, “Answer to Our Prayers,” and Murphy, *God’s Own Ethics*.

<sup>28</sup>See, for example, Swinburne, *Providence and the Problem of Evil*, and Daniel and Frances Howard-Snyder, “The Puzzle of Petitionary Prayer.”

<sup>29</sup>Stump, “Petitionary Prayer.”

self-solving character. To identify a reason to care about answered prayer that restricts what counts as answered prayer beyond what omnirationality allows us to say, we need to identify some good achieved by prayer that requires our prayers to “make the difference” in a stronger way. But if we’ve identified such a good, we’ve already given an answer to the typical puzzles of petitionary prayer: we’ve already said what reason God would have for doing things in response to our requests that he wouldn’t otherwise do. In other words, to identify an interest in answered prayer on which the puzzles of petitionary prayer arise is, typically, *precisely thereby* to identify a solution to those puzzles.

An example from the literature will help here. Consider the debate over responsibility-based defenses of petitionary prayer between Davison on the one hand and Swinburne and the Howard-Snyders on the other.<sup>30</sup> Swinburne says that it is good for us to take responsibility for each other and for what happens in the world, and God can extend our responsibility by refraining from doing certain things unless we pray for them. Davison objects: he says that God couldn’t actually extend our responsibility that way, since we’d have to be able to foresee whether God would answer a prayer of ours for us to be responsible for what happens, and so God’s refraining from doing things unless asked doesn’t actually achieve this good. The Howard-Snyders reply by saying (among other things): sometimes even if we can’t foresee what will happen as a result of our actions, we can still be responsible for what happens. Davison objects further to that line of thought, but then adds another objection that he doubts whether the “extension of responsibility” is a sufficiently good thing, since after all God could “extend our responsibility” in a similar way by making us more powerful or more knowledgeable, which he declines to do. And the debate goes on.

Here’s the point I want to make about this debate. Given what I’ve said so far about divine omnirationality and answered prayer, I don’t think we’ll end up with a significant challenge to the practice of petitionary prayer *regardless* of who wins this debate and others like it. Suppose the Howard-Snyders prove correct. In that case, we’ve raised a puzzle about petitionary prayer and solved it. Suppose Davison proves correct. In that case, we’ve shown that the puzzle doesn’t have a solution. But I think we’ve also precisely thereby gained reason to reject the conditions which gave rise to the puzzle in the first place. The puzzle only arose because in our practice of petitionary prayer we wanted to take a strong sort of responsibility for the course of things, and our prayers would have to “make the difference” in a strong sense as to what God does for us to take that strong sort of responsibility. The lesson I take from Davison’s arguments, assuming they are successful, is this: no, I shouldn’t want to take such a strong sort of responsibility for others in my practice of petitionary prayer, because that’s impossible and wouldn’t be a good thing anyway.

---

<sup>30</sup>A summary of this debate can be found in Davison, *Petitionary Prayer*, 118–124.

But if I adopt that conclusion, I've lost my reason to care in the first place whether my requests "make the difference" in the strong sense as to what God does. But if I've lost my reason to care about that, the whole puzzle never arises for me. Now to the objector who says "God would do the best thing whether you ask or not" I can respond: "well, why should I care whether my requests make the difference as to what God does? Didn't you just argue persuasively that there aren't good enough reasons to care about that?" Now, obviously this line of thought only works if we can make sense of offering petitionary prayers to God *without* caring about whether our request "makes the difference" in a strong sense; in other words, it depends on something like the divine omnirationality solution I've been defending. But given the divine omnirationality solution as a baseline, the standard criticisms of defenses of petitionary prayer actually dissolve the problems those defenses are supposed to solve in the first place.

I want to stop short of saying that every challenge to the general practice of petitionary prayer will be self-solving in this way, since I don't know how to construct an in-principle argument for that claim. I'll content myself with saying that the standard or usual puzzles for petitionary prayer that have been the subject of debate recently among Anglophone philosophers have this property. But I will say that it is rather challenging to imagine what form a puzzle would have to take in order not to be self-solving in this way. As far as I can tell, one would have to argue *both* that (a) we have a legitimate interest (more precisely, an interest that we should have and ought not to give up) by our own lights in wanting God to answer our prayers, an interest that would only be satisfied if those prayers might be able to "make the difference" in a strong sense as to what God does, *and* (b) that interest could never actually provide God with a good enough reason to do things differently depending on what he is asked to do. In that case, we would have a religious practice that, by our own lights, we ought to engage in but which, also by our own lights, cannot be successful. That would constitute a real puzzle for religious practitioners. But it seems to me rather easy, in the abstract, for the religious practitioner in question simply to deny that this gap (between our interests and God's) exists—to insist, for instance, that she actually ought to give up the interest in question in the face of the fact that the interest doesn't hold for God. So while I don't rule out the possibility of generating such a difficult puzzle (by arguing that our interests and God's come apart in this particular way), I conclude that it would be difficult to do so. Very likely, therefore, the puzzles of petitionary prayer will be self-solving in the way that I have argued.

So even though divine omnirationality doesn't dissolve all of the puzzles of petitionary prayer, it does have the result that most of the ways of raising the puzzle of petitionary prayer will contain within themselves the solution to the very puzzle they raise. Given what I've said about divine omnirationality, the debate over the puzzles of petitionary prayer,

though not eliminated entirely, ought to take on a different sort of character. Instead of thinking of them as challenges to the general religious practice of offering petitionary prayers to God, we ought instead to think of them as debates over the appropriate reasons to care whether God might answer our prayers. If there is an interest we have that motivates us to pray, and which requires that our prayers possibly make the difference (in a strong sense) as to what God does, then that interest raises the puzzles of petitionary prayer. And if it turns out upon closer examination that this interest couldn't ever actually give God a good enough reason to act differently depending on whether we pray, then we should probably infer that our interest is illegitimate and that we ought to pray with a different motive. The debates over puzzles of petitionary prayer then become debates among religious practitioners as to the appropriate motives for offering prayers to God—the appropriate reasons to care whether God might answer such prayers—rather than debates between religious practitioners and critics of the whole practice.

Whatever the fate of those interests we have in offering petitionary prayers whose satisfaction requires that our requests might make the difference as to what God does, there always remains another interest which does not require that our requests make *the* difference as to what he does. If our desire in petitioning God is simply to be involved in what God is doing, then the divine attribute of omnirationality implies that it is always true that God answers our prayers when he does the good things we ask of him.<sup>31</sup>

*Shawnee State University*

### References

- Cohoe, Caleb. 2014. "God, Causality, and Petitionary Prayer." *Faith and Philosophy* 31: 24–35.
- Cohoe, Caleb. 2018. "How Could Prayer Make a Difference? Discussion of Scott A. Davison, *Petitionary Prayer: A Philosophical Investigation*." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10: 171–185.
- Davison, Scott A. 2017. *Petitionary Prayer A Philosophical Investigation* (Oxford University Press).
- Davison, Scott A. 2018. "Requests and Responses: Reply to Cohoe." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 10: 187–194.
- Howard-Snyder, Daniel and Frances. 2011. "The Puzzle of Petitionary Prayer." *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 3: 43–68.
- Johnson, Daniel M. 2013. "B-theory Old and New: On Ontological Commitment." *Synthese* 190, 3953–3970.
- Kvanvig, Jonathan L. 2003. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding* (Cambridge University Press).
- Murphy, Mark C. 2017. *God's Own Ethics* (Oxford University Press).

---

<sup>31</sup>Special thanks to Scott Davison, for his comments and encouragement. Thanks also to Alexander Pruss, Mark Murphy, and the referees for this journal for helpful suggestions.

- Pickup, Martin. 2018. "Answer to Our Prayers: The Unsolved but Solvable Problem of Petitionary Prayer." *Faith and Philosophy* 35, 84–104.
- Pruss, Alexander R. 2013. "Omnirationality." *Res Philosophica* 90: 1–21.
- Smith, Nicholas D. and Andrew C. Yip. 2010. "Partnership with God: A Partial Solution to the Problem of Petitionary Prayer." *Religious Studies* 46: 395–410.
- Eleonore Stump. 1979. "Petitionary Prayer." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 16: 81–91.
- Richard Swinburne. 1998. *Providence and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford University Press).
- Van Fraassen, Bas C. 1980. *The Scientific Image* (Oxford University Press).
- White, Heath. 2020. *Fate and Free Will: A Defense of Theological Determinism* (Notre Dame University Press).