

Benjamin H. Arbour, ed. *Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism*. Routledge Studies in the Philosophy of Religion. New York, Routledge, 2019. 218 pp. \$140.00 (hbk).

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In *Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism*, Benjamin Arbour has put together an interesting collection of essays that respectfully, and critically examine open theism. For those of you who don't know what open theism is, it is a relatively new model of God and the God-world relationship. One of the unique claims of open theism is that God cannot foreknow what creatures will freely do in the future. This is often associated with other theological claims about God's temporality, freedom, creation, and divine providence. The movement began to gain traction with the publication of a collection of essays called *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* in 1994, written by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger. Since 1994, open theism has sparked a massive debate over the nature of God, human freedom, and divine foreknowledge.

Many of the criticisms of open theism have focused on biblical, historical, and theological debates. Various scholars question the biblical basis of open theism, whilst others question the biblical basis for a more traditional understanding of God. Some have tried to object to open theism on the grounds that it is out of step with the Christian tradition. Others have tried to argue that open theism gives us a theologically inadequate doctrine of God. Sometimes the critiques of open theism in these regards have been interesting and illuminating. Other times, the critiques have been deeply unhelpful. For example, many critiques have asserted that the God of open theism is really a creature, or that open theism is really just process theism in evangelical garb. To say that these critiques miss the mark would be an understatement.

Though there have been several collections of essays that critique open theism from a biblical, historical, and theological perspective, there has surprisingly been no collection focusing on philosophical objections to open theism. This is one of the unique features of Arbour's volume. It brings together an assortment of philosophers who examine the various claims of open theism.

The volume starts off strong with an excellent introductory essay by Arbour. Open theism can come in a variety of forms because there are multiple ways to cash out the claim that God does not know the future free actions of creatures. Arbour's introduction offers an up-to-date history of open theism, as well as clear demarcations between different varieties of open theism. Knowing the different varieties of open theism is crucial to understanding the essays in this volume. The authors in this volume try to be clear about which version of open theism they are attacking because they acknowledge that some versions of open theism

might be immune to their particular objection. The history and taxonomy of open theism provided in this introductory essay is an excellent starting point for anyone who wishes to go deeper in their understanding of open theism.

The first section of *Against Open Theism* is dedicated to the metaphysics of time, which is crucial to understanding the debate over open theism. The section gets off to a weak start with an essay by Eleonore Stump in which no metaphysic of time is put forward. The next chapter is by Sandra Visser, in which she discusses the relative strengths and weaknesses of open theism and theological determinism. The details of the analysis are somewhat sparse.

The section concludes with Benjamin Arbour's essay, "A Few Worries About the Systematic Metaphysics of Open Theism." Arbour offers a detailed analysis of systematic metaphysics, and takes aim at the underlying metaphysics of open theism. He rigorously argues that open theism must engage in a fairly deep revision of the standard systematic metaphysics of modality, which Arbour takes to be a cost for anyone wishing to defend the plausibility of open theism. As Arbour sees it, open theists who affirm that the future is genuinely open need to offer a revised account of modality in order to establish that open theism is even a viable option for Christians to consider.

Section two of the book focuses on more general philosophical problems with open theism. It starts with a paper by David Alexander in which he argues that a commitment to origin essentialism is incompatible with certain forms of open theism. This is a very clever argument, but as Alexander admits, it will only work against certain forms of open theism. In particular, the version that says that there are truths about the future. Alexander's argument will not work against versions of open theism that deny that propositions about the future have an indeterminate truth-value, or are all false. So Alexander's argument may simply force open theists to tighten up their position on truths about the future.

The next essay comes from Paul Helm in which he argues that theological compatibilism comes with its own kind of openness. It is a bit difficult to discern any kind of desirable openness that theological determinism might offer.

Katherin Rogers' contribution focuses on defending an Anselmian approach to the freedom/foreknowledge dilemma. Her essay offers a rigorous analysis of the Anselmian view that will provide readers with a much deeper understanding of classical theism. She offers a series of objections to open theism based on the nature of time, freedom, and omniscience. Her primary target is the version of open theism defended by William Hasker. Then she turns her attention to defending her Anselmian view of God from several objections offered by Hasker. In particular, she aims to rebut the claim that simple foreknowledge is providentially useless and lands one in viciously circular causal loops.

Robert B. Stewart's essay argues that the God of open theism either has false beliefs, or he can know some things that the open God cannot know. My initial reaction to this dilemma is that second half of the dilemma doesn't seem to be a unique problem to open theism. There are all sorts of things that I can know that the God of classical theism cannot know. Thus, I was left wondering what advantage classical theism has over open theism. For example, I can know the proposition <I am R.T. Mullins>, but the God of classical theism cannot because of the nature of *de se* beliefs. Given the classical commitment to impassibility, there is a wide range of experiential knowledge that I have that the classical God cannot. For instance, I can know what it is like to empathize with another human person. The God of classical theism cannot know this because impassibility explicitly denies that God has empathy. Those criticisms aside, the first half of Stewart's dilemma is stronger. He takes aim

at Greg Boyd and John Sanders who try to deny that God has false beliefs about the future. On Boyd and Sanders' view, God can be surprised by what happens in the future. Stewart offers an interesting argument that one cannot be surprised without having a false belief about the future.

The final section of the book focuses on problems for open theism based on philosophical theology. The section starts with an essay by James Anderson on past-directed prayers. Anderson argues that the God of open theism cannot respond to past-directed prayers. An example of a past-directed prayer could be something like this: I promise to pray for a friend's surgery which will take place at 7am, but I oversleep. Instead, I wake up at 8am, and pray that the surgery has gone well. As Anderson points out, many of us have offered up prayers like this. According to Anderson, different models of foreknowledge and providence can allow God to genuinely respond to these past-directed prayers based on what He foreknows we will pray for, whereas open theism has no such resources for God to answer past-directed prayers.

I found the argument interesting, and worth serious consideration. Though, ultimately, I found myself wondering if any model of divine foreknowledge actually involves God in genuinely responding to any past-directed prayers. This is because, on classical theism, God's providential plan or decree is eternally established prior to the existence of the universe or any praying creature. Whatever actions that God shall perform are settled before I come into existence, and before I ever utter a single prayer. One might be tempted to seek help for past-directed prayers from the philosophy of time. However, I can see no help because all of God's actions are settled before I pray on all of the major theories of the ontology of time such as presentism, the growing block, and eternalism. To make matters worse, classical theism very explicitly states that God's plan or decree for how history shall unfold is in no way influenced by anything external to God. On classical theism, God knows things because He knows the cause of all things—i.e. Himself. So again, I am left wondering if anyone actually has resources for saying that God responds to past-directed prayer.

Up next, Greg Welty examines the alleged advantages that open theism has with regards to theodicy. Open theists, like Hasker, claim that they can offer a much stronger theodicy than rival views. Welty offers an incredibly rigorous and nuanced argument for believing that open theism does not in fact have any advantage over its rivals. Anyone who is working on theodicy will need to consider Welty's analysis of the issue. It is incredibly fascinating and well-argued essay that makes a significant contribution to the debate over open theism. It is an essay that ought not to be missed.

Ken Perszyk focuses on open theism's ability to respond to the soteriological problem of evil. The soteriological problem of evil revolves around a set of issues about the doctrine of hell and universal salvation. He compares the relative strengths and weaknesses of open theism and Molinism. He argues that Molinism has more resources to handle these problems than open theism.

The volume ends with an essay by Keith Wyma. Wyma argues that open theism cannot offer a satisfactory answer to the pastoral problem of evil. The pastoral problem of evil is when a pastor needs to offer spiritual guidance to someone who is experiencing doubt in the face of evil and suffering. This is not just any kind of doubt, but doubt that God is trustworthy. Wyma's argument relies heavily on penal substitution, and I found myself wondering if this is really about open theism anymore.

Overall, I was impressed by the respectful tone of the critiques in *Philosophical Essays Against Open Theism* when compared to other volumes on open theism. I was also impressed by how careful, rigorous, and nuanced some of the arguments are in this collection of essays. These arguments probably won't push many open theists to abandon their view. Yet, at the very least, some of the arguments should force open theists to clarify their positions on various metaphysical and theological topics. Moreover, open theists might need to back off of the claim that they have certain advantages in theodicy over rival models of God. Ultimately, anyone interested in open theism, divine foreknowledge and human freedom, and the problem of evil must engage with several of the essays in this volume. This collection of essays offers significant contributions to the debate that scholars will need to consider as the conversation over open theism continues.