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On Petitionary Prayer

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> And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.—Matthew 26:39.

In Aldous Huxley's biography of Father Joseph (*Grey Eminence* 1941), a monk but also Cardinal de Richelieu's minister of foreign affairs, we find Father Joseph during the siege of La Rochelle praying (and asking Calvarian nuns to pray) for a number of curious things: "for the success of Father Joseph's pet plan for entering the town by night through an underground sewer and taking the garrison by surprise", "for the conversion of the Protestant Duke of La Tremoille", "for an amelioration in the behaviour of the King's brother Gaston", "for the defeat of the second English expedition", and so on. By describing Father Joseph's political engagement, Huxley masterfully highlights a tension between his 'political' prayers and the life of pure contemplation in which Father Joseph's own will is supposed to be annihilated and joined with God's.

Father Joseph's political prayers may strike us as misguided and misplaced, compared to petitionary prayers for the health and well-being of loved ones. Still such prayers are common among the faithful. Indeed, praying alone does not guarantee the prayer will be met. Priests in their sermons have always advised their fellow Christians to follow Jesus' example and pray just like Jesus prayed for 'the cup to pass him', not according to his will but according to the will of the Father. In other words, we can pray to God for healing or prosperity or some other matter, but we should accept any outcome with gratitude, as it is God's will.

In addition to this common misunderstanding of how petitionary prayer 'works', the way we make sense of it and its place in our faith has become particularly problematic in the last several centuries. That is, the understanding of what constitutes proper scientific explanation (and proper causal powers operating in nature) has changed to exclude the possibility of the intervention of supernatural force. This fairly recent scientific worldview disqualifies petitionary prayer altogether because, according to it, such prayer presupposes a faulty causal link between supernatural and natural phenomena; namely, it aims to accomplish an outcome in this world through supernatural means. As Wittgenstein argues, if we use prayer to make something happen here and now, we are treating prayer as pseudo-science (Wittgenstein 2020) and are engaging in superstitious not religious activity.

In the *Concept of Prayer* D. Z. Phillips (1965)[1] builds on Wittgenstein's remarks to develop a broader view of petitionary prayer. Phillips explains that, when done correctly, a proper petitionary prayer is not a prayer for God's intervention but a believer's attempt to be at peace with God's will. In this way, Phillips keeps the realms of science and faith separate and accommodates petitionary prayer to a modern worldview that does not permit supernatural causation. But is it really accurate to say that a believer does not pray for a specific outcome—the recovery of a child, life of a terminally ill friend, pregnancy—when no medical help seems to work? And when the believer does pray for these things, is she really

[1] Elaborated further in his later response to Walter van Herck's objections (2016).

committing the sin of superstition? None of this sounds right. To find an answer, in what follows, I explore Wittgenstein's and Phillips' understanding of petitionary prayer and ask where their views of science, faith, and superstition come from.

Wittgenstein and D.Z. Phillips: Petitionary Prayer and Superstition

Wittgenstein made only a few comments about the distinction between proper faith and superstition, but as always with Wittgenstein, these comments are telling. In one instance, he says: "Religious faith and superstition are entirely different. One of them springs from fear and is a kind of false science. The other is a trusting" (Wittgenstein, cited in Malcolm 1993, 18). What Wittgenstein is saying is that while true faith is nourished by our love of God, whereby we put our trust in God's will and accept the plan God has for us, our superstitious acts are the result of a lack of this trust. Through superstitious acts, we try to convince God to intervene and do what we think is best for us. When we engage in such acts, we try to influence future events and achieve a desired end: to get a job, to recover from illness, to travel safely, to win a war. In this way, we implicitly presuppose a causal link between our acts, God, and the happenings in the world. For Wittgenstein, this kind of superstition is a pseudo-science, a pseudo-technological stance through which we are attempting to regain control of the world.

It is important to note that for Wittgenstein, superstition is not confined to avoiding black cats, casting spells, and making voodoo dolls. It can also appear in formal religious practices, such as baptism. Baptizing a child so the child will be healthy and prosperous is superstitious. Baptizing a child to initiate the child in faith and make her a member of the Christian church is a sign of proper faith.

While Wittgenstein's clear-cut distinction between faith and superstition is easy to draw in some cases, the case of petitionary prayer presents a difficulty. People pray for various reasons: to converse with God, to connect, to share their love, to repent, to surrender themselves to God, but they also pray to ask God to help them with their immediate worries. These various functions of prayer cannot be easily disentangled. As his comments to his friends and his personal diaries show, Wittgenstein himself prayed. During WWI, we find him praying to be brave: "How will I behave when it comes to shooting? I am not afraid of being shot but of not doing my duty properly. God give me strength! Amen!"(Wittgenstein, cited in Malcolm 1993, 8-9).

Should this kind of prayer be regarded as superstition? After all, Wittgenstein asks God to give him strength and courage. Isn't he presupposing a faulty causal link and thus committing a superstitious act in his prayer? We may explain away this tension by saying that what he is really doing is trying to build up his own morale and not fail his fellow soldiers. We could say that there is nothing more to these prayers than self-encouragement, but Wittgenstein does not provide further clarification about what exactly he is doing when praying, neither at the time he was writing these words during the war nor later.

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D. Z. Phillips attempts to develop the Wittgensteinian view of prayer, and in his *Concept of Prayer* (1965), he devotes a chapter to petitionary prayer. He acknowledges that every petitionary prayer seems to be intended to make a difference in this world. The prayer asks for a particular "this" or "that", as Phillips notes, and in this way, it seems to presuppose a causal link between a prayer and a desired outcome. But if this is really the case, petitionary prayer will be a lot like a spell. So if a prayer is to make a difference in the world, what does this mean, and can we distinguish it from an incantation or a cry for help in times of danger? In other words, can there be a proper petitionary prayer that does not end up being superstition or a sign of distress?

To answer these questions, Phillips asks us to take a closer look at the context of prayer and the role it plays in an individual's life. If the person does not pray regularly but only in extreme, out-of-the-ordinary situations, it is more likely that the prayer is incantation, a spell intended to get a particular thing done; in other words, it's likely to be a superstition. But even here, we need to be careful and make fine distinctions. If somebody calls on God only when in danger, can this be disregarded as a mere exclamation or request for help, not of God but of a fellow human? In fact, Phillips finds nothing particularly religious in such an act. It might not be even superstition, as it stems from the desire to give our stress a voice. Now, if we consistently pray and negotiate with God in stressful times, this could be closer to what we would consider superstition.

According to Phillips, such negotiations with God stand in contrast to Psalm 23: "Yea I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for thou art with me". In the former case, infrequent petition, the prayer presupposes God can intervene and make a difference in the outcome. The latter, frequent petition, acknowledges the dependence between us and God and expresses complete trust in God and God's will. But Phillips is aware that most prayers come in the form of the former and seem to presuppose the possibility of God's intervention. Even Wittgenstein's prayer that he wrote on the Eastern front during the war asks God to give him faith, strength, and courage to endure and be brave in the face of death.

Phillips further argues, along with the Church and Desert Fathers, that if a believer thinks praying hard will make a difference and asks "Didn't I pray hard enough?" when praying "fails", this means the prayer is closer to superstition than to a religious act. So before we decide if a prayer is a superstition or an act of faith, we need to know the context: when, how, and by whom it is uttered, its motivation, and its spirit. What surely does not matter in prayer is the actual words and their order: "Prayers, unlike certain spells, are not ruined by a slip of a tongue" (Phillips 1965, 119).

Still, the question remains: What does it mean for a believer to ask God for the quick recovery of a sick child? Phillips argues there is no causal relationship between the prayer and the recovery of the child (should the child recover). It is not the case that praying caused God to save the child, and the child's recovery is not evidence that the prayer worked. What believers do in petitionary prayer is to acknowledge "their own helplessness, that the way things go is beyond their control and seek something to sustain them which does not depend

on the way things go, namely, the love of God" (Phillips 1965, 120). "It is true," Phillips says, "that God's will can be found in whatever happens, but the prayer of petition is best understood, not as an attempt at influencing the way things go, but as an expression of, and a request for, devotion to God through the way things go" (Phillips 1965, 120). Then, if the child gets better, it is an occasion to express gratitude for all God's blessings, including this one. If this is what the prayer is about, it is an act of faith. Anything else, and it is superstition.

Why, then, do believers mention specific hopes and desires? Why don't they just pray for God's will? In fact, Phillips says bringing up specific wishes and fears helps the believer reconcile himself with the will of God: "After all it is these desires and not any others which threaten to overwhelm him, and through which he must seek God" (Phillips 1965, 122).
In his concluding remarks, Phillips explains the status of the petitionary prayer that Wittgenstein wrote during the war. He argues that in all prayers in which we ask God to strengthen our faith, to have more love, or to have more hope, we bring God to life in us, so the connection between ourselves and God is not left to be external. In other words, when we pray to God to be brave and do the right thing, we do not ask for external help but for help from within. Applying this insight to Wittgenstein's case, we may conclude that he did not engage in superstition when he prayed on the frontlines of combat.

But is Phillips' description of petitionary prayer really what the deeply religious do when they pray? Are they simply asking for God's grace to strengthen their faith so they can endure whatever comes and nothing else? Phillips has been criticized (Van Herck 2016; Sweetman 2014; but also defended, see Whittaker 2008; Brenner 2009) for not describing what the deeply religious actually do when they pray but rather prescribing what the religious should do in their prayers. More specifically, he has been criticized for imposing on believers a philosophical distinction between proper faith and superstition based on his own outsider's view. This may indeed be the case. But why does he feel the need to do so? Petitionary prayer has always been endorsed by the Christian clergy[2] and laity (with the aforementioned caveats). Today, if we happen to be on Christian twitter, we may see pleas from fellow Christians to pray for a particular case: quick recovery of a child, successful job application, parents' health, and many more, sometimes not named, private intentions.

Moreover, when we take a look at the texts and letters of the Desert Fathers, we see petitionary prayer was common among early Christians. Their prayers seem to presuppose the belief in God's miracles. But the metaphysics of our modern times places a special burden on petitionary prayer because it excludes the possibility of miracles—hence, Phillips' need to give it a narrower meaning and disregard everything else as superstition.

Metaphysical Confines

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[2] See for instance the letters of Desert Fathers Barsanuphius and John in which they explain to their fellow Christians how they were to pray (Barsanuphius and John. (2007)).

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As we might expect, the worlds of the Desert Fathers of Late Antiquity and the 20th century Wittgensteinians are profoundly different. The world of the Desert Fathers is an ordered, moral universe governed by both worldly and other-worldly rules (Martin 2004, 200–204). The contemporary world of Wittgenstein and D.Z. Phillips is a dead, material, and mechanical universe of "efficient" causation, indifferent to human sense of good and evil (see Milbank 2022). For the Desert Fathers, transgressing the moral and natural laws[3] of this world by requesting non-Christian powers for help is forbidden magic akin to superstition. This does not mean that superstition will not work. On the contrary, summoning magical powers might bring us the desired outcome here and now but at the cost of the salvation of our soul. Still, praying to God for help is more than welcome.

For Wittgensteinians, superstition is the belief in a (false) causal chain, i.e., the belief in a supernatural intervention that will make a difference in this world. Hence, in proper prayer, we should refrain from requesting such an intervention. If we pray in this way, we are slipping into superstition. In other words, for contemporary Wittgensteinians, any intervention in this world is reserved for a joint venture of science and technology and is made possible by the laws of nature, while God's miracles are simply flights of imagination.

A historically inaccurate but very popular story about how we arrived at such a worldview goes as follows:[4] since the 17th century (with some earlier precursors), we have been witnessing the process of disenchantment with natural forces. Instead of turning to moral agents and the Aristotelian four causes, we explain worldly events and phenomena via mechanical (efficient) causation. In the last 300 years or so, we have slowly accepted that to explain any change in nature (from billiard balls colliding to the biological processes of growth), we need to look for a particular physical cause and the natural law that covers it. Once we identify both, we have successfully explained the phenomenon.

What does this epistemological move mean for our ontology? Well, it seems that nothing non-extended and immaterial can operate in nature. In other words, nature and everything in it become physical through and through. Non-physical, spiritual forces disappear and cease to be valid contenders for a proper natural explanation. Once we find ourselves in this disenchanted universe, the struggle to make our soul fit into it yields a variety of dualist (Descartes), monist (Spinoza), or materialist (La Mettrie) philosophies.

By the end of the 19th and early 20th century, materialists had prevailed. By then, beyond the state of our soul, God had become a problem. Now, even if we grant there is God and that at the beginning of time, God created the whole of nature in some unknown way, we are not allowed to believe in God's miracles because it makes no physical (scientific!) sense to have a

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[3] When I speak of the concept of natural law at the time of the Desert Fathers, I use the expression metaphorically to refer to the regularities in nature that alchemists, doctors, architects etc. relied on. But strictly speaking, the concept of natural law came into use in the 17th century. Before then, Aristotelian metaphysics centred on the nature of objects, and that nature set the objects in motion to fulfil their purpose (for a discussion, see Harrison 2020, 215)

[4] See Milbank (2022) for a more nuanced history.

non-natural, non-physical cause of a natural phenomenon. The new metaphysics excludes an interventionist God, even if it allows a transcendent one.

Another interesting aspect of the disenchantment with nature is the loss of its moral quality. Good and evil cease to operate in this world. Moral forces vanish along with moral purposes (teleological causation). Nature is left bare and indifferent. Life and death become neutral and natural phenomena. There is no moral drama in sickness, no Daimons who can hurt us, no prayers that can heal. The world changes from a highly meaningful one in which human drama unfolds to an indifferent world of simple mechanics.

By the end of the 19th and the start of the 20th century, the materialist, reductive, scientific worldview had won, and philosophers either attempted to reconcile faith and science or else dismissed the whole of faith as superstition. The thinkers who drew a line between faith and science and thus shaped our modern take on superstition were the early analytic philosophers: Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, and logical positivists of the Vienna circle. Through the logical analysis of language, they clarified the distinction between proper areas of empirical study and misguided and nonsensical metaphysical speculations.[5] According to these philosophers, the role of sciences is to deal with the world, explore it, and discover which hypotheses are true and which are false. Only theories that can be empirically verified are scientific. The rest belong to the sphere of nonsense, i.e., metaphysics, and should either be discarded (logical positivists) or saved for inspiration and meaningful life (Wittgenstein).

Once we are confined to the natural world in this narrow sense, questions about good and evil, beautiful and ugly, faith and lack of faith in God, and the like are left outside of legitimate, even meaningful, scientific inquiry. Within this new reductive scientific metaphysics, religious faith is discarded as superstition or partially saved because it has the special role of providing our lives with meaning. Either way, it ceases to be a part of legitimate knowledge of the world and, as such, should never intertwine with the proper realm of science. When it does (through ignorance or by mistake), it turns into superstition.

With those thoughts in mind, let me go back to the metaphysics of pre-modern times and the metaphysics of modernity, this time looking specifically into the different understandings of God's intervention and miracles. Such an inquiry can shed light on the way our metaphysics shapes our understanding of faith, God, superstition, and proper faith. This kind of history is particularly hard to do because we tend to impose our own understanding of natural, possible, and supernatural on the worldviews of the past, unaware of our own metaphysical limitations.

(Mis) Reading the History of Petitionary Prayer and Superstition

The worlds of Antiquity and the Middle Ages were profoundly different from ours. Martin (2004) correctly says it does not make sense to divide the world(s) of the past into the

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[5] Analytic philosophers were not the only ones working on separating sciences from other areas of human endeavour. For a discussion, see Reitter and Wellmon (2021).

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supernatural and the natural realms and then wonder how the two relate. For pre-modern people, gods, Daimons, and humans were of one and the same world, and their interaction was presupposed. Pagan philosophers tried to understand the rules of their engagement and came up with the concept of superstition. They used the word to describe foreign religious practices, as well as the fear of Daimons found among ordinary people.

According to the philosophers, such a fear is irrational and thus superstitious. Daimons (or lesser gods) are superior in every way to humans and thus more moral than we are. They simply cannot and will not hurt humans. But what about annual pagan sacrifices? Aren't they a plea to gods for protection? The philosophers contended sacrifices are not meant to please gods and Daimons and convince them not to bring sickness, drought, or floods. That is, they are not magical protection from evils. Instead, they are occasions to celebrate gods. This philosophical stance was not widely accepted, so the fear of gods and the desire to please gods through rituals continued.

Similarly, in the histories of early Christianity, we often find claims that the sophisticated Christian faith endorsed by the intellectual elite did not subscribe to fear, pleading, miracles, punishments, healing powers of martyr Saints, and the like. On the contrary, it is often argued that the Christian God of the elites was Platonic,[6] intellectual, and detached, while the faith of ordinary Christians was marked by superstition.
Peter Brown (1981) criticizes this skewed history of Christianity. When he was researching the rising cult of the Saints in late Antiquity, he identified a tendency in the scholarship to interpret such cults as deficient, unsophisticated, popular religion, i.e., superstition rather than proper faith. He argues this modern view of the cult of the Saints as superstitious and backward (i.e., popular Christianity) can be traced to Hume's *Natural History of Religion* (1750), where Hume suggests vulgar religion (i.e., religion shared by most people) must slip into superstition because most people cannot develop a proper theistic stance. We need personified forces in nature (whether these forces are called Daimons or martyr Saints) to help us fight against the evil ones. According to Brown, this Humean view of the martyr Saints was the precursor of our contemporary two-tier model of faith where there is proper faith for the elite and superstitious faith for all others. This distinction, as Martin notes, can also be found among the Ancient philosophers.

Hume's two-tier model brings us back to D.Z. Phillips and his concept of prayer. For Phillips when we pray properly, we do not ask for anything in particular, no outcome, no event. Such prayer belongs to the enlightened and to proper religious practice. When the prayer asks for God to intervene and perform a miracle, it is superstition. To elaborate this view, Phillips cites William James (1985):

> The refined supernaturalists … deny that the supernatural can in any way interfere with the course of events in the natural world: the world of the ideal never bursts into the phenomenal world at particular points. In contrast to this, the crasser variety, which has a huge following among the uneducated

[6] For some implications of this view, see Radenovic (2023b).

> "admits miracles and providential leadings and finds no intellectual difficulty in mixing the ideal and real worlds together by interpolating influences from the ideal region among the forces that causally determine the real world's details" (Phillips citing James; see Sanders 2013, 142).

But we may ask once again: Is this really the correct way to describe proper religious acts and proper prayer? Should we side with Hume, James, and Phillips and accept their view of legitimate religious practices versus superstitious practices, or should we look for alternatives? There are, of course, some critics of the common attempt to discard popular religious practices and petitionary prayer as superstition. Van Herck (2016), for instance, criticizes Phillips' view that any request for divine intervention is superstitious, i.e., an act of misunderstanding the causal chains in nature and pseudo-science. He says: "Religious devotion is not a search for coherence … So the notion of divine intervention should not be dropped in a description of prayer because it entails incoherent propositions." He is essentially saying that the received view of how the world operates should not guide our attitude to God or our faith in God's miracles. The arguably coherent worldview according to which there is no place for God's miracles in this world does not have the highest value for the believer.

In his response, Phillips argues that Van Herck admits there is something incoherent about petitionary prayer and assigns proper prayer to those who understand faith in the right way, while regular people harbour inconsistencies, remaining mostly unaware of them and leaving it to intellectuals and theologians to sort them out. Contrary to Van Herck, Phillips proposes everyone should learn to pray properly and coherently. Once again we come to the question: Is this for Phillips to say? Van Herck may be right when he accuses Phillips of externally imposing on believers how they should pray and what they should believe. After all, when we read the Desert Fathers, we see it is part of their faith to believe in God and God's miracles and to trust in God. It is part of the grammar of their belief, to use Phillips' words, to be humble, allow for the possibilities not predicted by a modest knowledge of nature (miraculous healing, for instance), and pray for God's grace and his miracles.

Instead of pursing the debate between Phillips and Van Herck, let me explore whether there are alternatives to their shared and very modern metaphysics. Both Phillips and Van Herck aim to accommodate their understanding of prayer (and religious faith in general) to a world that is dead, neutral, and amoral, i.e., to the mechanistic world of modernity discussed in the previous section. According to this view, as we have seen, God, if there is one, lies outside nature and does not interfere in matters of natural causes. Unlike the world of pre-modern people, there are no good and evil forces fighting for the human soul. There is only efficient causation in a value-neutral physical universe. This received worldview leaves little space for petitionary prayer as a proper kind of prayer. Believers who plead to God in their prayers appear to be ignorant people who do not know how to pray properly. Those who ask for nothing are the enlightened ones. But is there an alternative metaphysics? Is a metaphysics in which petitionary prayer makes sense and God's miracles are permitted within our reach?

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At first glance, it seems there is no such metaphysics, primarily because a disenchanted metaphysics better fits our sciences. Hanby (2022) argues a mechanistic, reductive metaphysics drives our search for how things in the world work and hence stands behind the enormous technological progress of the last few centuries. Hanby does not conclude the technological success makes this metaphysics true, but he notes that the very success renders the question of truth pointless. As long as we have results and use them to improve our lives, the dead universe of efficient causes is all we need. If this is the case, petitionary prayer, if it is to be a proper prayer and not a random superstitious act, needs to conform to Phillips' criterion: it must not ask for intervention, only for a change of heart.

But is this view of the role of metaphysics in technological progress really the correct one? In "Alternative Modernity and Its Discontents" (Radenovic 2023a), I argue this is not the case; our sciences and the experimental method go well with different metaphysics. But to see this, we need to explore historical cases of advances and stagnation in technological inventions. For instance, the popular claim that the technologically superior Roman civilization was dismantled because of the backward religious forces of Christianity (see, e.g., Wilson 2000) does not survive close scrutiny.

Some technological advances were made in some areas in Late Antiquity, while in other areas, skills and techniques deteriorated, but religious debates and the general worldview were not a crucial factor in either case (see Lavan 2008). Other cultural, social, and economic factors played more substantive roles. Finally, the extent to which inventors are inspired and driven by metaphysical systems (or general worldview) remains an open question and needs to be explored through individual cases. We may also argue that in some instances, metaphysical systems are shaped and influenced by technological breakthroughs not vice-versa.

In any event, it is doubtful whether a simple linear connection between the two (such as the assumption that "proper" metaphysics is driving scientific progress) can be established in the way we might like to believe. After all, in pre-modern times, we find Aristotelian metaphysics driving alchemical experiments, such as the search for the transformation of materials into gold (among other things). The Aristotelian concept of *prima materia* was understood as an achievable state if a technological way to free particular metals of all properties could be found. This would, in turn, allow the alchemist to add desired qualities to the bare *prima materia* and make gold at will (see, e.g., Viano 2018).

It is also important to note that our contemporary sciences seem to require more complex explanations of natural phenomena than the reductive mechanistic worldview of efficient causation permits. If we take a closer look at quantum mechanics, various biological phenomena, and ecology (to name a few), the philosophical dream of reducing all complex events to basic particles and their interactions evaporates (for an overview, see Varela, Thompson, and Rosch 1991; Oyama 2000; Thompson 2010).

The preceding points suggest the experimental method should be separated from reductive mechanistic metaphysics. Such a method, along with technological progress, despite what

philosophers like Henby argue, is not the product of the impoverished, empty universe of efficient causation. How and why we moderns ended up with such metaphysics is a historical question. Milbank (2022) gives an extraordinary, detailed account of how this happened and cites the contributing social, political, and cultural factors that put other kinds of metaphysics (non-mechanical metaphysics of "enchanted" transcendence and immanence) aside. In a nutshell, the mechanical worldview did not win because it was true or because it was the only one able to produce useful technological inventions but because a combination of various social forces pushed for it.

Where does this leave us in our understanding of petitionary prayer? I propose the following. First, we no longer need to worry about how to make sense of interventionist God because our metaphysics tells us that nothing from the outside of the physical world (i.e., its enclosed domain) can interfere with it. In other words, there is no pressing reason to embrace such metaphysics in the way Wittgenstein, Phillips, and even Van Herck do. Now, this does not mean petitionary prayer works like a mechanical device (i.e., we only need to pray a sufficient number of times and God delivers) as Wittgenstein and Phillips, along with Desert and Church fathers, correctly note. If we believe it does, we are superstitious, not because we irrationally believe in God's intervention, but because we do not understand what prayer is about. The Desert Fathers explained this clearly to their fellow Christians. Prayer is about repentance and alignment with God's will, but it is also about a plea for something of great value to us (health of a child, a job etc.), accompanied by our trust that God (if it is God's will) can perform the miracle.

This brings me to a modest conclusion. In a world not constrained by reductive metaphysics and efficient causation, there is a place for God's miracles. In such a world, there is no need to make our prayers coherent with an impoverished metaphysics. Instead, the lesson to take home is to be very cautious about the metaphysics we accept because the current reductive one is far from given. This means that those who pray for the quick recovery of a sick child or for a job are not irrational and superstitious by default, nor is it on philosophers to prescribe how believers are to pray. On the contrary, we, philosophers, are advised to be humble in our beliefs and to allow for possibility that our current metaphysics might not have the final say on the nature of the world let alone of the prayer.

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