

Dominican School of Philosophy & Theology  
Issues in Divine Action  
STPH 4885  
Fall, 2019  
Thur. 12:40-3:30, DSPT 2

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**Course description:** *A seminar course exploring how certain classical philosophical insights into the nature of causality (Aristotle and Aquinas) may be brought to bear on contemporary issues regarding divine action and empirical science. The course requires either an in-class presentation and written summary of one's semester research or submitting a research paper.*

**Goals:** *Students will acquire a fundamental understanding of the theology of divine action, how it incorporates the principle of causality, and how our understanding of that principle has been affected by developments in science. They will also see how developments in contemporary science have been incorporated into the theology of divine action and how they invite a retrieval of the Aristotelian-Thomistic understanding of causality. Finally, they will acquire a basic knowledge of the different methods of theology, philosophy, and science.*

**Objectives:** *Students will be able to explain basic issues in the theology of divine action including how our understanding of causality has influenced the discussion of divine action, how empirical science affected our understanding of causality; how theories of contemporary science have been employed in the discussion of divine action, and how they point to a broader understanding of causality that invites a retrieval of the notion of causality as found in the thought of Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas. Students will also be able to explain the methodological differences between theology, philosophy, and science. This will be demonstrated by class discussions, weekly papers and a final research paper.*

- Sept. 5        **Introduction**  
M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, Introduction, pp. 1-10  
Ian Barbour, "Religion in an Age of Science", chapter 1: 3-30
- Sept. 12      **Divine action as a problem**  
M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*: chapter 1: 11-33; chapter 2: 45-53; chapter 3: 105-118  
L. Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language"  
F. Dilley, "Does the 'God who Acts' Really Act?"  
T. Tracy, "Theologies of Divine Action"
- Sept. 19      **Solutions: Deterministic world and divine action**  
M. Wiles, "Religious Authority and Divine Action"  
G. Kaufman, "On the Meaning of 'Act of God'"  
D. Griffin, "Relativism, Divine Causation, and Biblical Theology"  
W. Alston, "Divine Action: Shadow or Substance"  
W. Stoeger, *Contemporary Physics and the Ontological Status of the Laws of Nature*
- Sep. 26       **Solutions: Intelligent Design**  
Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Part I, Q. 2, a. 3, co. ["Fifth Way"]  
M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, chapter 2: 77-93; chapter 4: 134-136; 148-153  
M. J. Behe, "Irreducible Complexity: Obstacle to Darwinian Evolution"  
W. A. Dembski, "In Defence of Intelligent Design"  
C. Doran, "Intelligent Design: It's Just Too Good to be True"  
K. R. Miller, "Answering the Biochemical Argument from Design"
- Oct. 3        No class
- Oct. 10      **Solutions: Emergence**  
M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, chapter 2: 56-63; chapter 4: 120-126; 138-140  
P. Davies, "The Physics of Downward Causation"  
A. Peacocke, "Emergence, Mind, and Divine Action: The Hierarchy of Sciences in Relation to the Human Mind-Brain-Body"  
N. H. Gregersen, "Emergence: What is at Stake for Religious Reflection"  
P. Clayton, "Toward a Constructive Christian Theology of Emergence"

- Oct. 17      **Solutions: Chaos Theory**  
 J. Polkinghorne, "The Metaphysics of Divine Action"  
 J. Polkinghorne, *Theology in the Context of Science*, 96-122  
 J. Polkinghorne, "The Law of Nature and the Law of Physics"  
 W. Wildman, *The Divine Action Project, 1988-2003*, in "Theology and Science" Vol. 2, No. 1, 2004, 47-50  
 J. Polkinghorne, *Response to Wesley Wildman's "The Divine Action Project"*, in "Theology and Science" Vol. 2, No. 2, 2004, 190-192  
 W. Wildman, *Further Reflections on "The Divine Action Project"*, in "Theology and Science" Vol. 3, No. 1, 2005, 71-75
- Oct. 24      **Reading Week**
- Oct. 31      **Solutions: Quantum indeterminacy [Guest lecturer: Bob Russell]**  
 M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, chapter 2: 53-56; 63-77; chapter 4: 119-120; 126-134; 136-138; 140-147  
 R. Russell, "Special Divine Action and Quantum Mechanics: A Case for Non-Interventionist Divine Action".  
 R. Russell, "What We've Learned from Quantum Mechanics about Noninterventionist Objective Divine Action in Nature-- and its Remaining Challenges," pp. 133-56, 163-64.  
 P. Hodgson, "God's Action in the World: the Relevance of Quantum Mechanics"
- Nov. 7      **Broader perspectives: Methods of theology, philosophy and science**  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Division and Method of the Sciences*, in *Super Boethium De Trinitate*, Q.5, aa. 1-4; Q.6, a. 1: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/BoethiusDeTr.htm>  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q. 1, aa. 1-8; I, Q. 13, a. 5; I, Q. 32, a. 1, ad 2, Q. 68, aa. 2-3: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/FP.html>  
 W. Wallace, "St. Thomas Aquinas, Galileo, and Einstein"  
 Ian Barbour, "Religion in an Age of Science", chapter 2: 31-65
- Nov. 14      **Retrieving causality**  
 M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, chapter 1: 33-44; chapter 2: 94-104  
 Aristotle, *Physics* II, c. 3: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/physics.2.ii.html>  
 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Book V, Chapter 2: <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.5.v.html>  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Aristotle's Physics* Bk. II, lect. 5-6, lect. 10, § 240: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/Physics.htm>  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics*, Book V, lect. 2-3: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/Metaphysics5.htm>  
 W. Wallace, *A Place for Form in Science: The Modeling of Nature*.
- Nov. 21      **Divine action in Aquinas**  
 M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, chapter 4: 153-159, chapter 5, 160-204, chapter 6, 205-228  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 14, a. 8, 13; I, Q. 19, a.4, 8-9; I, Q. 105, aa. 2-5: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/FP.html>  
 Thomas Aquinas, *De potentia* Q. 3, a. 7: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/QDdePotentia.htm#3:7>  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Commentary on the Book of Causes*, Propositions 1, 20, 24  
 E. Gilson, "The Corporeal World and the Efficacy of Second Causes"
- Nov. 28      THANKSGIVING DAY (NO CLASS)
- Dec. 5      **Providence, Prayer and Miracles**  
 M. Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action*, chapter 7: 229-264  
 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I, Q. 19, a.9; Q. 22, aa. 1-4; I, Q. 105, aa. 6-7: <http://dhsprory.org/thomas/summa/FP.html>  
 R. Te Velde, "Thomas Aquinas's Understanding of Prayer"  
 T. Nichols, "Miracles in Science and Theology"  
 K. Ward, "Believing in Miracles"
- Dec. 12      **FINAL WEEK OF SEMESTER (NO CLASS)**

**Readings:** One book is required: Michael Dodds, *Unlocking Divine Action* (available through the DSPT (Amazon) website): ISBN: 978-0813229614. The other readings are in Moodle.

**Course work:**

In preparation for every class meeting, students are required to formulate 3-4 discussion questions based on the readings for that week. Every question should be accompanied with one or two sentences explaining context of the question (maximum of 100 words for each question/explanation). These questions should be turned in (by Moodle) each week by the day before the class meeting. They will form the basis for the class discussion.

The course will also require a 15-20 page research paper on a topic chosen by you and approved by the professor, and a brief (5 minutes) in-class summary of your paper to be given on December 5..

**You should turn in a title and brief description of your research paper topic (200-300 words) by October 31.**

Grading will be based on the following criteria:

Class participation/ weekly questions:	40%	Graded on evidence of thoughtful engagement with the texts and active participation in the class.
Research paper:	60%	Graded on knowledge of the topic, creativity, organization, clarity, and evidence of graduate-level research (footnoted references to primary and secondary sources and bibliography).

Work is also evaluated in terms of the institutional goals of the school. For these, see page 1 of the DSPT Student Handbook [[http://www.dspt.edu/files/Student\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.dspt.edu/files/Student_Handbook.pdf)].