



The Problem of Divine Action and the Order Project

By Nancey Murphy

Abstract:

One of the most significant points of intersection between Christianity and science in the modern and contemporary West has been the relation between the concepts of *divine action* and of *the laws of nature*. Early modern natural philosophers promoted the concept of exceptionless laws, in part, for theological reasons, and then that legal-mechanical worldview was used for apologetic purposes. Yet the consequence, ironically, was that it became difficult to conceive of any *special* divine actions, which many judge to be essential for making sense of Christian practice and theology.

In this lecture I provide, first, a brief digest of this history. Then I report on the outcome of an eighteen-year project, sponsored by the Vatican Observatory and the Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences, on the problem of divine action in light of a variety of recent advances in science. During the course of that project I came to see the concept of natural laws as highly problematic and argued, largely for theological reasons, that we need to think of the world in terms of natures rather than laws.

I end by drawing some conclusions about the way in which the Order Project opens doors for further progress on the problem of divine action.

Talk at St Hugh's College, Oxford, 12 September 2011, 2-5pm