

EDITORIAL

‘Special divine action’ (SDA) is what John Austin might have called a ‘trouser-term’, in the sense that its function is to exclude possible ways in which divine action is not special. For SDA, what is excluded is deism or some similar conception of divine action limited to that of first or uncaused cause, or cosmic designer, or sustainer. A positive definition of SDA is more challenging, but within theology, it is common practice to take account of various distinct modes of SDA, especially grace, inspiration, miracles, and providence. Such action is usually considered as particular to time and place, as in the case of the inscription in Nazareth that reads, “The word became flesh *here*.” Such action is also generally considered to take place in response to some state of affairs in the world and often understood in terms of an intervention in the ordinary course of nature.

For obvious reasons, the possibility, meaning, and purported occurrences of SDA are central concerns of theology and religion, and they are the issues associated with divine action that are usually of greatest personal, social, and political interest. Since views about divine action also tend to shape views about human action, the topic also has implications beyond theology and religion alone. The study of such matters, however, has often been framed in terms of a fairly narrow set of concerns, questions and approaches, with the terms of debates since the eighteenth century often set by David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Given subsequent advances in philosophy and science, a growing appreciation of the vast amount of neglected scholarship on SDA, and the hopes and fears raised by a resurgence of religious beliefs concerning divine intervention, it is timely to re-examine what the philosophy of religion can contribute.

For these reasons, we have welcomed the generous opportunity provided by the *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* to dedicate this issue specifically to SDA. The papers presented in this issue are based on presentations from a conference at the University of Oxford, 13-16 July 2014, organised by the Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, Faculty of Theology and Religion. This conference was under

the auspices of a major project on special divine action at the University of Oxford, made possible thanks to a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, and carried out in collaboration with the Department of Philosophy of the University of Western Michigan, with digital humanities tools for future research on SDA being developed by the Texas Center for Applied Technology.

The first two papers of this edition, by Alister McGrath and Benedikt Göcke, set the scene by examining hesitations about the study of SDA and the changing situation today. Papers by Daniel von Wachter, Robert Larmer, Joel Archer, Ignacio Silva, and Andrea Sangiacomo challenge details of the various frameworks that often shape arguments concerning SDA. Lenn Goodman examines the notion of God's governance, drawing especially from Maimonides. Colin McGinn presents problems raised by God's purported interaction with the world, especially as regards the mind of God, and Andrew Pinsent examines a model for how divine understanding might be communicated, drawing some practical implications for catalysing insights in daily life. Aside from their intrinsic merits, we hope that these papers encourage further research by showing some of the many new possibilities for the study of special divine action in the philosophy of religion.

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