

ITS NOT ENOUGH TO BELIEVE THE TESTIMONY OF OTHERS TO MIRACLES

What's a Miracle?

A miracle is an event that is not naturally possible. That does not mean it is necessarily impossible. There could be a power greater than nature such as a god that can do it. An example of a miracle would be water changing into wine.

Miracle by definition is highly unusual and therefore rare

God will do miracles but not to fix errors in his creation for he is all-powerful so there will be no errors. He will do them to show us his love and power and presence and to make us better in virtue. But does he?

Anyway we see that a miracle by definition must be extremely uncommon so we need a lot of good evidence to justify believing in it. God will not need to do miracles much if he is efficient. In fact one good miracle would suffice.

If a miracle is reported, is it more likely that there is a natural explanation than a supernatural explanation? Miracles by definition have to be rare.

Miracles and their believability

David Hume said that a miracle is so unlikely and bizarre that it is always more likely that the witnesses to it are lying or have made a mistake.

Commonsense and instinct agrees. Most of us are slow to believe somebody who claimed an encounter with fairies or angels or spaceships.

Believers counter that we don't know what is likely.

Believers start to claim we don't know anything. They therefore go so far as to tell us that we don't know if all the milk in the world will turn into dishwater in a minutes time. That is true. But we assume that it will not happen. We are not talking about what we know but what assumptions we need to make to be able to live with one another and to live at all.

We do not need to be reminded of the horrible fact that we do not know.

We get on with life without knowing many things, many hugely important things, and we get on with it by assuming that nature works routinely. We assume the tea pot will boil if we do certain things and do not expect a magical intervention where we get good tea without even heating up the kettle. Miracle claims undermine our capacity for making the assumptions we need. They challenge them and make them harder to make. They damage their force. That is not good for us. They want to undermine our right to make the assumption and none other. It's a human right to make it.

Miracles are superstition in the sense that they express and promote a harmful religious attitude towards ourselves and others and especially unbelievers. It makes believers insecure and you only have to look at the hatred vented by believers in the Marian apparitions of Medjugorje against those who think the apparitions are hoaxes attributable to Satan or man or both.

The believer's intention is to open the way for belief in miracles. That is what matters to them. They use the fact that we don't know and turn it into an excuse for holding that miracles may happen. It does not follow that just because our knowledge of the future doesn't exist that miracles may happen.

You have to assume miracles unlikely for you cannot live if you say, "I don't know what is likely or unlikely", and really mean it.

The believers understand and believe that we must assume that nature will not change in the future. The sun won't turn into a moon. This matters more to them than miracles. They might deny it but it does. Would you believe a person who said they don't care if their skin is pulled off their back? They make the assumption but state that miracles are exceptions.

The problem with miracles is that they may be so improbable that only the expert who can examine the evidence for them and find it of excellent quality has the right to believe. If religion is right to answer that we do not know what is likely then

it follows that we have the right to guess that they are unlikely. Why guess that they are likely? Would you guess that it is likely that your dog will bilocate or miraculously clone in a few seconds?

Why should we go against the grain and our instincts to honour our religion's claim that miracles happen? How conditioned are our emotions by religious upbringing?

Miracles, to date, even if they happen are still not believable. Even if a miracle is believable, it may not be believable enough to justify joining a religion especially one that demands crosses and sacrifices and doctrines that can be upsetting or harmful.

It always comes back to testimony!

A testimony in favour of a miracle is evidence.

Even religion, at least in principle though in practice it is sometimes different, never regards a testimony as enough.

This is probably because some have testified to a miracle and have been found to be mistaken or deceitful.

They say they need other evidence. For example, if somebody sees the Virgin Mary in a vision they expect the person maybe to be in an inexplicable trance that can be tested. So religion will look into the matter with the help of science.

But they end up falling back on the testimony. The science still cannot prove that the person really is seeing what they say they see.

So why bother with the science?

It would be more honest to simply depend on the testimony.

The testimony to what reason says is always stronger than the testimony that comes from sense information. For example, chances are the philosopher who says it is irrational to believe in miracles is right and the person who sees a miracle is wrong. Also, you can check out the philosopher's thinking and you cannot check out the testifier to miracles in the same way. You can experience the philosopher's thinking for yourself. You cannot experience the visionaries vision.

Believers nearly all depend on what experts tell them. They listen to the wrong experts. Most philosophers reject the idea of miracles. Many of those that accept the idea change the definition of miracles. For example, St Augustine said a miracle is not a supernatural event but a natural event that we cannot explain. He was a sceptic though he didn't realise it!

Supernatural beliefs make you biased and immune to logic. For example, if one believes God turned bread into real flesh and the CCTV shows trickery one can say the Devil did something to the CCTV. If you accept testimony for the claim that God that then you must accept testimony for the second.

Huge evidence is needed for miracles!

If somebody says they have a piggy bank you don't need evidence that they tell the truth. It's not unusual.

If somebody says they have a bomb in the house you would expect them to provide evidence.

If somebody says they have a nuclear bomb in the house evidence would be no good. You would have to see the bomb and see the proof that it really is a nuclear bomb. You would need to send the scientists in.

So the bigger the claim the more evidence and the better the evidence you need for it.

A tiny miracle would be a bigger claim than a nuclear bomb. A nuclear bomb is natural and a miracle is not. A miracle is supernatural. A miracle by definition is extremely unusual/improbable. If its not meant to be unusual/improbable then there is no point in God doing it.

From all that it is clear that you cannot believe in a miracle on the strength of somebody else's testimony. You need to see it yourself.

If we are religious and open to miracles then we have to assume that people who claim that they have a nuclear bomb in the house and people who testify to miracles may be neither believed or not believed. We take a neutral position.

This is not assuming that miracles don't happen. It is not accusing anybody of lying. It is respecting yourself by avoiding credulity.

To this religionists say, "You are being dogmatic and unfair. You are assuming miracles don't happen without considering the evidence for them."

This is slanderous and unfair. They do not believe it themselves. They prove that by refusing to believe an outstandingly good person who says he is innocent of murder when the DNA evidence says he did it. They will not believe him even if he says a demon magically set him up.

If we say it is unlikely for a man to rise from the dead the believers are forced to answer that we don't know what is unlikely or not. This answer shows the immorality and wickedness of declaring miracles to have happened or possible. Why? If we say that the dead are dead we have no right to say that if we believe that people can come back from the dead for how do you in Sweden know that it isn't possible or unlikely for all the dead in Australia to rise this moment? How can you say the dead are dead or that the dead don't return? Because of the consequences of miracles, they deny the uniformity of life never mind nature, the burden of proof is on the believers. And the burden doesn't get lighter with "small" miracles. Why? Because if we can't say the dead are dead because of our respect for miracles then how can we say that people need to study if God miraculously inspires a schoolboy or schoolgirl regarding the correct answer to a small question in an examination paper?

We must not be quick to believe

Because a miracle is uncommon, it is always easier for a person to be lying, self-deceiving or fooled or mistaken than for that person to be a real witness of a miracle. That means a high standard of investigation and evidence is necessary. People need protection from miracle-mongers. To support miracles lightly is to enable the culture of credulity that saturates much religion.

Its easier to lie or be wrong about witnessing a miracle than to be right.

The more uncommon we think miracles are the more we will hold that to be true. Following a religion with belief in very few miracles is safest. You are less likely to be led astray by a charlatan than you are if you belong to a religion that believes in lots of miracles such as Christianity. To follow a religion like Christianity that is fond of miracle tales is irresponsible. It violates the principle that religion should teach and operate in such a way that people don't lose out on anything should the religion be wrong. This is simply the principle that religion should be about people.

The believer cannot be expected to believe in say, the miracle of how St Bernadette's body never decayed, unless he is given the training and the tools with which to test the body himself. Is that unreasonable? Not a bit. It is difficult but not unreasonable. There has to be claims so big that they demand that treatment. If a miracle is not such a claim then nothing

Miracles are so serious and strange that they must be believed only as a last resort because the evidence, hard evidence, forces you or near-forces you to believe. So says the Roman Church. Yet this is the Church that leaves the bishop not the evidence or the investigation to decide if a miracle happened! Oh the hypocrisy! Anyway, back to the last resort point. It implies that miracle claims are bad at least until they are verified. We must be reluctant to believe in them. Miracles then must be evil. They invite people to evil. In that case, all the verifying in the world isn't going to make them good or entitle anybody to say they come from a good God.

Conclusion

Christians who oppose, "Extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence or evidence that's as amazing as the claim. The more magical the claim the better the evidence you need before you can believe and be rational and responsible" are deliberately deceitful. And they care little about people when they are trying to make credulity a virtue and respectable!