

MIRACLES, EXCEPTIONS TO NATURE?

The evidence for the exception to the rule needs to be equal to the evidence for the reliability of the rule

A miracle is...

A miracle is an event that shows or proves the activity of God. It is not obvious God exists if you see a statue. Believers in miracles say that it is obvious that God exists if he makes it bleed or talk.

A miracle is either a violation of nature or it is not.

Is a miracle an exception to the way nature usually works? A miracle undoubtedly is. Some say that is all a miracle is. Thus it would be an exception to the way nature works but not against natural law. It's not a violation.

The accusation

Religion says atheists should be looking at the evidence that miracles have happened instead of assuming they are as good as impossible. They call that arrogance. But do the believers look at the evidence for ghosts? Why are they always told what miracles to check such as the resurrection? If a miracle report is a miracle report then it does not matter where you start. To pick out the resurrection shows a bias has already started unless it really is the name plucked out of a hat. You have already tried to believe. You are called arrogant for not believing in the miracles religion WANTS you to believe in. It is not about miracles but what they want you to check or believe. It is believers who have a bigger problem with arrogance than the unbelievers.

The Christian religion says that Jesus rose from the dead and it is held that he is the only person who did that and nobody will do it again.

This tells us something.

The believers are as good as saying nobody rises from the dead. One person rising out of billions is the same as saying that virtually nobody rises.

Unbelievers are only going a little step further. What is arrogant about that? There is nothing important about that though religion makes a big deal of it.

It follows that even if unbelievers are biased believers are as bad and worse. The latter feel free to accuse unbelievers of being unreasonable and miracles is not a nice belief when it goes with an accusation. And miracles necessarily lead to accusing. Belief in miracles being immoral does not mean that they do not happen but it does mean we should go and investigate something non-miraculous instead!

Mutually exclusive?

Religion says:

Dead men stay dead

Jesus was an exception having risen from the dead.

It says that unbelievers in miracles make the mistake of thinking the two are mutually exclusive. Religion says all laws have exceptions and it does not follow that if something happens a certain way a lot that it should happen that way all the

time. David Hume is accused of having made the mistake of thinking nature's regularity means there can be no exception. He didn't. He merely said that if a miracle happens, it is an exception, and you need huge evidence to make it sensible to believe in it. He meant that evidence says all dead men stay dead and if the exception is to prove the rule there must be very good evidence to justify belief in the exception.

Christians say its the general rule that dead people stay dead. They say Jesus rose and this was an exception. The exception to a general rule does not override the general rule. The general rule still stands. The general rule will always be the big rule and the exception will always be small in comparison.

The general rule is actually bigger than the exception. It is more important then to say nature is regular than to say a miracle has happened. If there has to be a choice then stand by nature. In a way we have to be reluctant to believe in miracles. Being reluctant to believe does not mean you must never believe but it means you have to believe if the reasons are serious enough and good enough.

You need to debunk false miracles and verify the rare but real ones

Believers in miracles say they respect nature and its regularity and say that believing that rare exceptions such as miracles happen is not to undermine or destroy faith in nature.

But what if a miracle happens? You may have evidence that it happened. But even with having the evidence you cannot just assume it is a rare exception. There are countless other miracle claims made in the world. And most of these will be unknown to you. To have the right to say a miracle is a rare exception requires you to try to debunk all those other miracles. If you want to declare a miracle to be a rare exception you have to uncover evidence of fraud or possible fraud for all the other miracles. A miracle fake or real is a matter for evidence. That is why you cannot simply assume its a rare occurrence.

Look at it this way.

A miracle by definition is a rare and supernatural occurrence.

I need evidence to justify saying that is what a miracle is.

I need evidence that the many miracle claims in the world are all false or doubtful.

I need evidence to see which miracle claims are true.

Not an exception but a violation

There can be no exception to the law of nature. Why? Because miracles break the rules of nature and are not just exceptions. Take a statue that cries tears of blood. That is an event that presents itself as a violation of nature. It is not an exception. An exception would be if some bird was spitting blood on its eyes making it run down its face. Blood coming from nowhere is a violation not an exception.

Evidence cannot show you if a miracle is a violation or exception. You only guess.

If you have to guess that a miracle is an exception then why not guess that it is a violation?

Because of this problem, belief in miracles as exceptions still opens the door to seeing them as violations. It risks and opens the door to the bad things that that entails.

Insults God's intelligence

You make a law that you will recite only letters. If you recite letters and put one number in the middle of them that is an exception to the law you made. Applying this to God is saying that God intended nature to run a certain way and then decided to change this for a moment. This implies that God makes mistakes and is not all-powerful or all knowing but rather incompetent when he gets into bother with something rather minor. A supernatural being should be able to do everything right. If the law were that you would use letters and one number then it would not be an exception though it would resemble one. It looks like an exception but it is not. So this view eliminates the idea of miracles being exceptions made by God for he knew what he was doing and planned them. But if they are not exceptions then they are no more supernatural than everything else is. If so, then the sun rising is as much miracle as Our Lady appearing at Lourdes is in which case there would be no sense in her appearing there for the miracle would be pointless. She would be going out of her way to do strange things.

If we cannot see that everything is supernatural, then a miracle happening is not going to help us see it. In fact it would lead us to seeing it as supernatural and everything else as not supernatural. We would be ending up further from the truth of God's supernatural agency not nearer.

The Church cannot accept the exceptions view though many confused or crafty individuals within the Church do. There is an objection that says that God can do what he likes and may have always intended to interfere occasionally with nature. The answer to it is that God could make us believe in him and give us the inbuilt knowledge that he exists and what religion is true just like he gives us knowledge of other things that we cannot deny even if we wish. That would not thwart the kind of free will that is necessary for salvation - the free will to love for we can believe but not have faith which is a mixture of belief and love. This tells us that miracles are corrections of failures and deny that God is all-powerful. But God must have great power to do them in the first place so why is he such a bungler? This is a sure indication that if blood really can come out of nowhere on a communion wafer without tampering or trickery then God is not the source - the source is nothing that is entitled to honour or worship. The event is just a marvel but nothing that has any religious value and it is outside the scope for having any spiritual value as well.

To call miracles exceptions or even to say that they just look like exceptions is to fall into the following hole. Exceptions and seeming exceptions should prove the rule. Exceptions must prove the rule. Working out that God needed to do the miracle is more important than working out that it was a miracle. If miracles are signs of God's loving activity then the why is what matters most. But religion does not worry why God does individual miracles. And indeed it cannot work it out and admits it. It does not care then if it attributes miracles to God that he has not done. It just uses them as sectarian propaganda.

If miracles are exceptions then they prove that there is a rule. This means the evidence for miracles should be as persuasive and strong as the evidence for the rule. It is always less certain that a miracle happened even if you see it with your own eyes than that nature can be changed for in most of your experience nature goes on the same way. So that is loads of evidence of your eyes and the eyes of others against the evidence of your eyes when you saw the miracle. The loads of evidence comes first. For the exception to prove the rule, the exception has to have as much evidence for it as the rule. Miracles can never have as much evidence as that so they do not prove the rule. They attack it. If God were happy with nature it would mean that miracles are exceptions. God doing miracles means that God has become dissatisfied with nature and is trying to correct his mistakes. And bizarre mistakes they are when he would make Mary appear at Lourdes and things like that. Miracles accuse God of being totally insane.

What if miracles only happen through good Christians which would make them appear to indicate that Christianity had the truth? Miracles are bizarre. That would make them more bizarre than ever. A kind of seemingly supernatural event that cannot stand as evidence for anything is more bizarre if it is restricted to a certain group and seems to want to support that group's claims. When a miracle is not evidence it should not be restricting itself. It wouldn't and can't matter then what group it manifested in.

Miracles are useless as signs if the religion they verify is unreasonable and implausible. So it follows then that miracles only give evidence for religion to people who already believe or who find the religion believable or plausible! Unless you believe you won't see the miracles as evidence. So God doesn't need to do miracles after all. To say he does just to get our attention is to say they are for believers not us outsiders. If God does miracles for this purpose then they must be exceptions not breaches of the law of nature. It would be insane to suggest that God has to break the laws of nature and exercise force for the sake of providing signs for those who already believe and don't need them. The trouble is that saying they are exceptions is insane for the same reasons. But saying they are violations is worse.

Exceptions only prove the rule when some reason comes up that prevents the rule from being put into effect. If you must jail murderers then you will do it unless there is a serious reason why you cannot. You cannot jail them if terrorists threaten to blow up schools with children in them if you jail the murderers. If you must jail murderers and refuse to jail one because you are in a good mood and feel sorry for him then this exception does not prove the rule but breaks it. So exceptions only prove the rule when it would be a worse evil to put the rule into effect. To state this another way, exceptions to the rule are only allowed when you are forced not to put the rule into effect.

To say that any given miracle was an exception is to say that the rule that nature will not be changed had to be ignored. Christians cannot claim to know why the rule was abandoned so all they can do is verify that a miracle happened. But is it sensible to say that a miracle happened and was an exception to the law of nature when you don't know what justified the exception? The law or rule is important. That is why its exception can only come when there is no other way to do the right thing. Only then does the exception prove the rule. The rule then is more important than the exception. To say the exception proves the rule is to make the rule more important when something serious alone can justify suspension of the rule. It implies it is regretful that the rule has to be interfered with. It implies that it is a necessary evil. Religion then has no right to rejoice in miracles. But it does. The Christian joy at Easter for example is a sin.

The miracle being a necessary evil if it is an exception tells us several things. It tells us that God is not all-powerful and all-wise for he sets up nature and regards breaking it as evil and yet he gets into the situation that he has to do obvious miracles. This denies the all-wise and all-powerful God that most miracles claim to be speaking of. Miracles then contradict themselves – a God that can do them should be able to do everything the way he wants but he is clearly not. A God who is forced to do things is not much of a God. Since God is all perfect he must owe it to himself to do only what he wants. Miracles say that God is all-wise and all-powerful and they also deny it. They are useless. You may as well regard the flowering of a primrose as important as the resurrection of Jesus.

As necessary evils, miracles should not be celebrated or sought for they are necessary evils. To celebrate them would be like celebrating a baby having two heads. This could imply that whoever is attracting people to sites like Medjugorje or Lourdes in search of a spiritual miracle or even a physical one or a vision it is not God but an evil angel of sweetness and light.

If miracles are necessary evils, you should only believe in a miracle when there is absolute proof that it has happened. Absolute proof doesn't exist. Suppose a miracle seems proven. Perhaps a conspiracy took place and it's a hoax. You cannot prove there was no conspiracy. To believe in miracles is evil unless you see them yourself and can prove them yourself. Thus you cannot depend on what other people say for people who are honest as far as you can tell may still be fibbing when they can. People like to tell strange lies. The person who never tells a lie might tell a supernatural lie for there is no possibility of being caught out. The supernatural can't be experimented on or anything. So the proof then for miracles happening is not good enough for a miracle is an exception to the way things usually work. St Bernadette of Lourdes and St Padre Pio then committed sin when they encouraged belief in the miracles they said they saw and experienced.

Exceptions to the rule are bad. They are necessary evils. To say that God needs to make exceptions to his laws means he can't run the universe and has to fix his mistakes by suspending or changing the way nature works.

You need a very serious reason to say a miracle has happened so you would need to know why the exception to nature was made. Because you are saying

nature is so important for nature is the rule it follows that if you have any excuse for disbelieving in the exception you should use it and disbelieve. Nobody can understand why a miracle was done for only God could do that so God cannot expect us to believe in miracles. Indeed even if he was doing them he wouldn't want us to believe in them.

The notion that miracles are exceptions to the rule does away with the idea of God having to fight the laws he created. That

is the only advantage. It is really a rationalisation to avoid admitting that miracles do not give a sensible or dignified picture of God.

Exceptions must prove the rule. They can only do that if you clearly prove the reasons for the exception. In other words, the rule might be that your charity does not pay out money to drunks. That's the rule. But there might be a very unusual and extreme case where you might have to pay the money out to a drunk. This is not contradicting the rule for it means you have no choice but to give the money. No rule can be kept at all costs. An exception will be allowed to the rule IN CASES WHEN IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN KEEPING THE RULE. We need to see the reasons and prove them before we can consider any miracle to be an exception. Religion replies that God knows these reasons and that is enough. But what if evidence appeared that some priest was turned into a frog? Religion universally says miracles like that are nonsense no matter what evidence is produced. It can only say that if it can come up with reasons why such miracles didn't happen. The Catholic Church refuses to investigate miracles and apparitions that contradict Catholic doctrine for it says regardless of the evidence they were not real or from God when they contradict the Church. If you say that dead people stay dead. If the Christian says that Jesus was an exception. The burden of proof then is on the Christian. They need to know why the exception had to be made but they cannot and they don't claim to. They need to know how it was made as well. Because if there is no question of how then there is no question of why either for how matters more than why.

We know an exception is not against the rule but upholds the rule. Thus it follows that we must only believe in a miracle if we know (not guess or suppose we know but really know) why it happened. If God can't tell us that, then he is only doing magic tricks. Then miracles would be evidence against the existence of God rather than evidence for him.

If you start saying that bad people are not really bad but just making exceptions to ethical obligations when you don't know what the exceptions are that is bad. And so is saying miracles have happened when you don't know what justification there is for the exceptions.

If you need very strong evidence that will fill books that somebody committed murder, imagine how much evidence you need to prove that Jesus rose from the dead. Religion's evidence for the resurrection isn't that good. It is always more likely that the witnesses of miracles are lying or mistaken or both than that any miracle they report must have happened.

If a miracle is an exception to the rule of nature it also means it has to be an exception to how we understand the rule of nature. It is a challenge to us. We have to assume we know the way nature works in order to live. It challenges our assumptions. That is actually evil! The only challenges to our assumption that we should experience are ones that correct our misunderstandings about how nature works.

To say, "this miracle really happened because it was an exception to the law of nature and it was an exception because it really happened" is circular reasoning and is no good. You may as well argue, "This miracle didn't really happen for it was an exception to the law of nature and such exceptions do not happen." In fact, if there is a circle to choose from it should be the latter for the latter respects nature and what we can see. It doesn't look for unnatural explanations. Remember, if we start looking for unnatural explanations or far-fetched ones we will soon become total nuts and incompetents.

You can formulate the idea that evil is the mere absence of good as the idea that evil is the absence of order. Good is proper order and organisation. Evil is disorder. Miracles change order in our thinking and in the laws of nature. It follows then that miracles are evil. If miracles are evil then we lose the only real reason to believe in religion or God. We can't argue miracles are signs that God exists for only he can perform them.

Conclusion

Miracles are either supernatural or they are not. To say they are natural makes no sense and neither does saying they are supernatural. We should not waste time studying them.

If God does miracles, miracles are exceptions. But they cannot be exceptions therefore God does not do miracles. This is not dogmatism for it is just what reason says. Miracles are evidence against the existence of God.

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