

## *An argument saying extraordinary evidence for miracles is not needed*

Christians often say the principle that if you make a huge claim you need hugely good evidence is wrong. Against it they argue that lots of things happen that are extremely improbable and we don't demand extraordinary or exceptional evidence for them. For example, it was unlikely for Napoleon to have been born where he was born considering that the world is so big. And you don't demand extraordinary or exceptional evidence for that. True – why should we? He had to be born somewhere. What they choose to miss here is this. We do not need evidence for where Napoleon was born but we do need evidence for miracles. We do not need extraordinary evidence before we believe where Napoleon's birthplace was. If we wanted to argue that Napoleon was born of a virgin by a miracle we would need extraordinary evidence for that. They are deploying trickery here. Though it is true that it is improbable that Napoleon should have been born at all it is different from the improbability of his being born of a virgin. This principle is so simple and well-known that the likes of William Lane Craig denying it in *The Case for Faith* (page 88, 89, Lee Strobel, HarperCollins, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2000) can only be explained by wilful lying.

Having the perfect hand in cards means you will win before the game begins. It is very unlikely for it to happen. But if somebody reliable tells you that he had such a hand would it be wrong to disbelieve him just because it is very improbable? Christians say it would be wrong to especially if he is a friend. Christians say then, with sceptics, that the resurrection of Jesus for example should be a very improbable event. If it were not, it would not be a real miracle. Miracles are necessarily improbable and amazing events. Christians compare miracles to the perfect hand of cards as something that should be believed in or at least as something that cannot be dismissed just because they are very improbable.

They deliberately overlook four things.

One, the perfect hand is not a serious matter for those who are told about it at least. It is no big deal if we believe it. A man rising again is. An investigation is necessary if we decide to try to believe and a very big in depth one at that.

Two, perfect hands are naturally possible. Nobody can prove that dead men coming back to life is possible. If we could prove it was possible and explain it, it wouldn't be a miracle.

Three, why should we accept or investigate the resurrection as if it should be given prime consideration? There are millions of rival miracles. Why should we single out Christianity's most focused on miracle for our undivided attention? Picking it out indicates that you are already trying to assume it is true or are actually assuming.

Four, it is possible to believe that a miracle may not have happened without dismissing it. It is possible to be sceptical and open to the idea that a miracle might have happened. Dismissing something is not the same as disbelieving in it. Belief and unbelief are not full certainty. Dismissing something would be rejecting it outright and saying it is an impossibility. Disbelieving it is merely saying you don't have the right evidence or enough evidence to believe but have enough to say it is probably untrue. It is based on evidence and thus open to further light.

Extraordinary claims require a degree and clarity of understanding that is equally extraordinary. But that is lacking in the witnesses to miracles. No top scientists experience apparitions of the Virgin Mary. It is usually uneducated children.

Just because something happened doesn't mean it should be believed in. That depends on probability and evidence. The evidence you need must be in proportion to the likelihood of the claim. You wouldn't believe that the local couch potato won a marathon even though it is possible without a miracle. You would demand very good and serious evidence first. The more serious and harder to believe the claim is the higher the standard of evidence you need. You need perfect and even better evidence for supernatural claims and the believers cannot provide that. They reject commonsense and practice deception.

If evidence points to a man who cannot see at all as a serial killer who has been going out at night shooting people dead then the evidence is fake because the probability of such a man being able to kill is too low. Probability is more important than evidence and evidence depends on it for validity. There has to be a point at which even evidence should not be listened to [This is hypothetical. We know evidence never lies. But what if it did? That is what we are talking about!]. Miracle believers are trying to take that principle away from us. Yet they have the nerve to use the principle when it suits them. They complain that we say miracles are too unlikely to be believable and they say we don't know what is likely. They believe we do know what is likely. If they didn't think their cars were likely to get them to work would they have them? They try to intimidate and they dishonestly and falsely accuse us of irrationality.

Suppose the principle that you need a lot of evidence and to understand it well before you can justify and make it sensible to believe in a miracle is wrong. Even if it is wrong, ideally we should have a lot of evidence and understanding. Believing without these things would be a necessary evil. It would not be something to be celebrated but to be regretfully put up with. It would be wrong to participate in Mass for example. You would be honouring your faith in a miracle - the miracle of Jesus and his body and blood taking the form of food and drink. Such faith even if necessary should not be revelled in.

Miracle believers deny the principle. Murders happen and yet we demand a huge pile of evidence before jailing killers for murders are out of the ordinary. Miracles are more uncommon than murders and the same quantity of evidence would be no good for verifying them. Believers demand extraordinary evidence for extraordinary miracles they don't like such as Buddha's enlightenment but they don't for the miracles that suit their religious preferences! The evidence they present is only an excuse. They would believe, or think they believe, without it. Miracles invariably induce bigotry and dishonesty and blindness. Not very godly are they?

The bigger the claims for a religion the more understanding you should have of the why and what and which of the religion's doctrine. To say you experienced a miracle that tells you that the Roman Catholic Church is the true Church of Christ puts that burden on you. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. The stranger and the more unusual the claim is the more evidence you need to justify accepting the claim as true.

The critics of this dogma say the problems with this are,

\* Sceptics say they want amazing evidence for an amazing claim and then when they get it they are still not satisfied and demand even more evidence and on and on it goes and they are never happy. The paranormal believers say sceptics need to define what they need and how much of it and not keep shifting the goalposts.

The truth: That has nothing at all to do with debunking the dogma. The principle is right though the application of the principle may be flawed. Many sceptics in fact accept miracle claims on insufficient evidence. Others seek too much evidence and are never satisfied. Getting it right is hard. The abuse of the dogma does not refute the dogma.

Critics argument is ad hominem - it says you do not need huge evidence for magical claims because needing that evidence means you want too much and will never be happy! An ad hominem argument attacks the other person not his arguments.

I am glad the critics use the ad hominem because what else can they say? It proves that faith in magic is not harmless - it is potentially slanderous to honest seekers who have sceptical minds.

\* Sceptics forget that what is an extraordinary claim differs from person to person and depends on the circumstances. So what is called extraordinary depends on what you believe is extraordinary. For example, Jesus instantly healing the sick would have been ordinary as far as his disciples were concerned for they were so used to seeing those miracles. But they are extraordinary to us.

The truth: This objection fails to distinguish between a claim being found to be extraordinary in its nature and extraordinary in the sense that it provokes a sense of awe and wonder and astonishment. The apostles got used to Jesus' miracles (if they happened as the example says!). The miracles were still extraordinary despite them failing to feel and see how wonderful they were. Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence means when a claim is bizarre even if people start forgetting how bizarre it is it needs an outstanding and very high level of good evidence.

\* Sceptics forget that the extraordinary evidence may be there but what happens is people confuse the issues with their, usually incorrect, interpretations so the evidence is not seen for how powerful it is. For example, a birthmark that appears as a result from a spaceship's radiation will get a normal interpretation even though the person carrying it may know different.

The truth: All evidence is a matter of interpretation. We should accept natural non-supernatural interpretations and eschew supernatural ones. Why? Because if we don't we will soon be in the psychiatric ward. For example, if it is your twentieth birthday and you win twenty dollars in a draw you will hold that this means nothing instead of arguing that its a miracle how you got twenty on your twentieth.

As for the person with the burn knowing different, do they really know? Are they lying or deluded?

\* Extraordinary things can be true and there can be no hard evidence for them. Perhaps the evidence will be got one day. Thus we should believe in the paranormal without extraordinary evidence.

The truth: True sceptics agree that extraordinary things might have happened and left no evidence. True sceptics are willing to wait for evidence but until it is got they cannot believe. To say we must believe on the basis of evidence that we may get one day is actually a ridiculous statement.

Anyway, say if Mary appeared miraculously at Lourdes in 1858. No matter how long we wait we will never get hard extraordinary evidence for that for its in the past. Their point does not help us.

\* The claim is based on the assumption that anything supernatural or paranormal will be either impossible or extremely unlikely. Just because sceptic A was never abducted by aliens does not mean that Jane couldn't have been abducted by aliens. Those who reject the supernatural assume that the paranormal and supernatural are very improbable and impossible and near-impossible. This is not proven. It's only an assumption. It is not fair to demand incredible evidence over an assumption.

The truth: Believers themselves have to hold that the paranormal is unlikely. To say anything else means we should not even bother investigating it. You don't investigate the prices in the local supermarket in case they are all overpriced to an illegal or insane degree. You take it for granted that it is likely that the prices are acceptably accurate and that errors are unlikely. Believers must want us to ignore evidence of the paranormal and supernatural. To say, "Don't bother checking it out", is the same as saying, "Damn the evidence!"

Those sceptics who insist on having excellent evidence for magical claims, are accused of ignoring the evidence. They are said to hold on to their sceptical beliefs despite the evidence for the paranormal and that they are wrong. If I find loads of evidence that miracle cures really happened at Lourdes and I still am undecided that the miracles were supernatural I am not ignoring the evidence. The accusation is false and unfair. It proves that belief in the supernatural is implicitly rude and arrogant. And even more so when the believers are alerted to their own arrogance and won't desist. If sceptics are arrogant then they are less arrogant than the believers. We should all be sceptics in that case.