

Physics Super-Brain Stephen Hawking opposed credibility of miracle claims

Physics super-brain Stephen Hawking dismisses the notion of a God intervening in the universe or space to do miracles. Miracles are arbitrarily distinguished from magic. Religion denies that a miracle such as God making things where there was nothing at all or raising a man to life after being dead three days is magic. This amounts to redefining magic as miracle when it suits the ideology. If science verified a miracle it would have to say, "Maybe it's magic." Such a stance would destroy science with ridicule and it does not follow that if magic happens it should be obvious so science would be defunct.

Hawking says nothing has to turn into something. Critics are saying that Hawking is saying the magic of things coming from nothing happened but that there was no magician to do the magic. In other words, he agrees with believers that all things came from nothing but denies that God had anything to do with it.

They say that power caused all things to come from nothing. This was God's power they say. But the power can exist on its own - maybe it exists and God does not. I am an intelligent being. But this intelligence can still exist without me. It doesn't need me to exist! My intelligence is a power I use but it is not me so it can exist without me. See the point? Creation does not prove the existence of God.

And if something cannot come from nothing, no power however great can make a difference. To say that nothing made all things from nothing makes more sense than to say something made all things from nothing. Why? Because if nothing can become something, nothing can make something. And you don't need to say any more.

Hawking rejects the thought that miracles, understood as supernatural events happen. He sees it as a law of nature that miracles, exceptions to the law of nature, do not happen (page 79, God and Stephen Hawking). But Hawking has diluted his view that there are no exceptions to natural law. It is because his view is incompatible with the Uncertainty Principle.

But the uncertainty principle is a natural law! If it is the explanation for miracles then it follows that miracles are natural after all. Somehow time and space warp to cause a statue of the Blessed Virgin to bleed. The Christians are very dishonest because they see miracles as supernatural and they are trying to have us believe that the Uncertainty Principle implies that miracles can happen.

Page 83 states that people like Hawking who deny miracles and are naturalists - i.e. see no reason to believe in the supernatural - are not the biggest destroyers of belief in miracles. It states that it is people who believe in miracles as a frequent everyday occurrence that do that and it happens because they won't admit there could be natural explanations.

Page 88 tries to make out that to say for example the resurrection of Jesus never really happened because it is natural law that dead men don't rise is irrational. They say that it is natural law that dead men don't rise by natural means but by supernatural means. There is no natural mechanism involved but only supernatural.

It is best to talk in terms of nature behaving in a uniform way rather than to speak of natural law. It is more accurate. Law does give the impression that some entity decreed that things had to be that way. It is that impression though it is false that enables the likes of Lennox to say that only belief in a creator God gives a satisfactory ground for holding that nature is uniform and runs by laws (page 91).

There is methodological naturalism - that means that even if miracles happen you assume that there is a natural explanation even if you can't find one.

There is metaphysical naturalism - that denies that miracles happen.

The first one is a method. The second one is a doctrine.

There is a difference between the two. You don't need as much evidence to defend methodological naturalism as you do metaphysical naturalism. Christian liars try to pretend that both are the same and that methodological naturalism is merely an euphemism for metaphysical naturalism (page 146, The Infidel Delusion). They even say metaphysical naturalism is more honest than methodological. This is nonsense though they say they think methodological naturalism is saying that you cannot accept the supernatural is the explanation for an event even if it is the right explanation. Methodological naturalism admits that it is an assumption and a method and what is wrong with that? We all need assumptions and methods. To assume, if miracles are possible that they never happen would not be honest or sensible. This is Christians trying to make the truth look ridiculous.

Christians say the resurrection of Jesus is an extraordinary event if miracles don't happen but if they do it is ordinary enough and so you don't need extraordinary evidence. This is unbelievable! They are really saying you need incredible evidence for the impossible! But if something is impossible then no evidence will ever be good enough. Indeed the evidence will be entirely irrelevant and useless. The desperation they show in order to excuse their inability to come up with better evidence that Jesus rose is alarming. They are fundamentalists. The fact remains that if the supernatural happens, we need better evidence than the evidence needed for a bizarre natural event to justify believing in it. Christians know that themselves for they would not consider claims that Sai Baba rose from the dead.

The Christians say the resurrection is not a weird event for it served a purpose: to give everlasting life to Jesus our saviour and to show that we can be like him when we rise again. That is a lie. Jesus was able to get everlasting life without the resurrection. He could have waited until the last day when all the dead rise. Also, he showed those who saw him that people can be like him. He didn't show us. We have only hearsay.

Even if there were a purpose, it wouldn't help anyway. If my baby vanishes from the cot and a changeling takes its place there is a purpose. A fairy wanted rid of her ugly baby and to swap it for mine. The purpose argument makes more sense with lesser supernatural beings than with a God. God is perfect and does only perfect things. A lesser being will be imperfect and will have some daft reasons for doing things. Thus a lesser being will have more potential purposes for doing things than God has. If a miracle happens, we must ask what the cause's motives and reasons are. We must ask that before we even check out the miracle for authenticity. Why? Because if the supernatural entity had no reason to do the miracle then it is safe to assume that it didn't do it. If you come up with reasons, then a miracle may have taken place. Then you can apply scientific and other methods to investigate to see if the miracle is authentic. It's simple.

Christians say it is unfair to expect remarkable evidence for the resurrection of Jesus because we don't ask a lottery winner to provide remarkable evidence that they really won. They reason that as it is very unlikely for the person to have really won the lottery, that we should expect remarkable and exceptional evidence if the principle that: the more bizarre the claim is the better the evidence that is required, is correct. They are trying to make the principle look unreasonable though it is obviously pure commonsense.

The Christians confuse two distinct events:

E1: The event of the lottery being won (by someone or other). You don't need exceptional evidence for that. It is not a remarkable thing.

E2: The event of the lottery being won by someone in particular. You do need exceptional evidence for that. We simply do not bother with looking for it. It does not mean the evidence is not required.

The Christians put E1 forward to make it look like that excellent evidence of exceptional quality and/or quantity is not required for justifying belief in the resurrection of Christ and the other miracles he supposedly did. They don't deal with E2 in depth for it refutes them. They prefer not to mention it so that people will confuse E1 and E2 and think the poor evidence for the resurrection is sufficient.

Their attitude actually implies that a little evidence is enough to establish huge claims in everything and not just in religious matters.

Christians say that a preference for more evidence before one will believe in Christianity isn't equivalent to a need for more. They are saying the evidence then is sufficient.

This argument denies that each of us has the right to decide what is sufficient. What is sufficient for one is too much for the next person and not enough for another. So if I prefer more evidence I need more evidence. End of.

The resurrection of Jesus is not a wholesome doctrine. It was the reason Christianity spread so well and is so successful. That an alleged piece of magic should spread a religion and not its doctrine of love your neighbour is disturbing and shows the priorities of the Christians.

Hawking holds that the laws of nature show that a miracle cannot happen and that believers in miracles are mistaken. They mistake the naturally unexplained for the supernatural.

If there is nothing and the miracle of creation happens then it is not a miracle happening in the framework of nature. Jesus died through nature and he rose and then nature picked up the change as if it were not supernatural. Miracles being surrounded by nature and sort of respecting it by letting it take over the second after the miracle happens looks as if they want nature to be stronger than them or that it is stronger. Thus miracles are open to doubt - the only exception is the unobservable miracle of something coming where there is nothing.

Lennox argues that it is the laws of nature that show us that a miracle occurred. He implies that we need to believe in natural law in order to be able to recognise a miracle. But that has nothing to do with the point Hawking makes. Hawking states correctly that there could be natural laws that rarely act and because we don't understand them they can be behind the events categorised as miracles.

Even if we believe in natural law we still cannot recognise a miracle.

A miracle will only respect the laws of nature if it is an exception to the rule. Exceptions that do not prove the rule are contradicting the rule. Unless God tells us his reason for performing a miracle we cannot consider it to be a miracle. Suppose it is claimed that God heals Johnny to show his unbelieving parents that he exists. That is not a reason. What about the other parents in the world that do not believe? Also, if the parents have free will there is no need to think that the miracle will persuade them. The reasons then have to be very grave and exceptional. The sceptic of miracle claims has more respect for God than the believer in such claims.

Hawking would think that Christians would investigate miracles that seem to support Christianity and they pay no attention to miracles outside this context such as the pagan miracles of Herodotus.

The Christians say that the evidence for Christian miracles is good so they don't need to consider miracles that do not support Christianity.

The evidence could be good. But if miracles are not confined to the Christian faith then clearly they should be investigated. This is to be fair to other faiths. It would be wrong to argue, "We have good evidence for our miracles and so we ignore their miracle stories". Maybe the other faiths have good or better evidence.

Just because miracles happen in Christianity doesn't mean they don't happen in other faiths. If they do, that implies that the Christian assumption that miracles verify Christianity may be false.

The believers say that they are interested in the miracles of the Christian faith because there is a lot at stake. They say Christianity being the only true road to Heaven is extremely important and no other faith can claim as much importance.

The implication is that unless a faith threatens those who disobey it with hellfire and punishment and says they walk the wrong path you should not consider its miracle claims! How Machiavellian! It is mad to suggest that we should consider the Christian claim that Jesus made a fig tree miraculously wither and ignore the miracles of Herodotus which are better just because of Jesus' threats. That is giving in to intimidation.

CS Lewis showed that miracles are not against natural law. If you count money and find that there is money missing you take this as evidence that a thief has been at work - you don't regard it as a violation of the laws of arithmetic.

The most important thing about an alleged miracle is that it is supposed to be supernatural. Miracles are first and foremost based on the understanding that they are supernatural. Supernatural means magic. If God can make something out of nothing then witches could get the power to turn princes into frogs. Religion is telling a bold lie when it pretends that miracles are not the same as magic.

Why does society and even religion frown upon believing that a witch can turn you into a toad?

Is the reason that they assume that this cannot happen?

Or is it that it can happen but doesn't?

Either way they don't want us to believe it because they consider such beliefs superstitious ignorant and potentially

harmful.

Either way they declare that they are entitled to say that people are not turned into toads. And then they condemn the atheistic belief that Jesus did not rise from the dead. So they are entitled to make assumptions but not us? When a person has to assume in order to choose between supernatural explanations and natural, the person should be praised for choosing the natural assumption. They agree with this but only when it suits them.

They imply that believing in the power to turn people into toads is bad and ignorant. What about their own belief that Jesus rose from the dead? If one is bad and ignorant so is the other!

Suppose you assume that people do not turn into toads by magic. Why do you assume it?

People will prefer to dogmatically suppose that it cannot happen. It makes them feel sensible. There is more to fear in a world where such things can happen even if they don't.

The view that it can happen that a person becomes a toad by magic but doesn't is just as ridiculous as saying that people are turned into toads. You may as well believe that they are. You are only a short micro-step away from believing it. You have no evidence at all to justify saying that if it doesn't happen it might start happening now. We have to leave out the supernatural to live in this world. If we won't venture out the door in case vampires exist, we need to dogmatically assume that they do not and get on with life. So we should bin supernatural beliefs.

You have to presuppose that an alleged miracle is supernatural. The presupposition is the important thing. The believer sees a vision of Jesus and proclaims it a miracle. But that is only because he assumes it is supernatural. So in reality, "This miracle is evidence for the existence of my God or that my religion is true", means, "My assumption is evidence." But you can call anything a miracle with that kind of logic. Why not assume that your bread seemed to toast faster today and that was a miracle? Miracles are dangerous for they repudiate the reality check we all need. They do this because they declare magic happens and because all miracle stories are based on presumptions. Miracles give the testifier an occasion to be devious because he pretends they are evidence when they are not.

The Christians like to say that we could be wrong about how uniform nature is but they don't remind us that we need to believe that it is uniform even if we are wrong. For example, if we find an inexplicable and seemingly impossible puddle on the bathroom floor, we just say we don't know how it got there. We don't say, "A miracle or supernatural event explains it!" That is the sensible, honest and "moral" approach.

Books Consulted

Is God a Human Invention? And Seventeen Other Questions Raised by the New Atheists, Sean McDowell and Jonathan Morrow, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2010

God and Stephen Hawking, Whose Design is it Anyway? John C Lennox, Lion, Oxford, 2010