

David Hume comments on the miracles of the Bible

David Hume did not argue that miracles never happen. He only said that the evidence for them is always overridden by the stronger evidence that nature tends to be very regular. Thus a report that a dead man rose from the dead is to be assumed to be false for we see that the majority of dead men stay dead. Even if you did admit the man rose you still have no reason to think that he really rose. Maybe the miracle was in how people including him thought he was dead. He said we should believe in a miracle if the evidence is watertight and sufficient.

Mackie observes how Hume is assuming in his argument that there are no well-attested miracles. If so his argument could apply to all miracles but only if they are flaws in how they are determined to be miracles. Whatever you think of that it certainly works to make the miracles of the Bible fit only for the faith of the credulous reader.

Hume's argument that miracles are only reported by ignorant people is dismissed by many on the grounds that stupid and smart people alike can tell the difference between a dead man and a living one and so can testify to a resurrection and thus have the right to be believed. That as we seen is simply not true. All you can do is say the dead man could have risen from the dead.

Of the Bible which is an account of miracles, Hume writes, "We find it full of prodigies and miracles. It gives an account of a state of the world and of human nature entirely different from the present; of our fall from that state; of the age of man extended to near a thousand years; of the destruction of the world by a deluge; of the arbitrary choice of one people as the favourites of Heaven, and that people the countrymen of the author; of their deliverance from bondage by prodigies the most astonishing imaginable. I desire anyone to lay his hand upon his heart and, after a serious consideration, declare whether he thinks that the falsehood of such a book, supported by such a testimony, would be more extraordinary and miraculous than the miracles it relates, which is, however, necessary to make it be received according to the measures of probability above established." (David Hume, Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding).

Some say the problem is that Hume is describing miracles as intrinsically improbable and that is not fair. It is said to be just writing something off as rubbish without thinking about it properly. But again he didn't dismiss the evidence for miracles as rubbish. He just said that it is insufficient in the bigger picture.

We conclude that believers merely assume that a miracle is a miracle. They are in fact "believers" not believers. They have to distort what logic says. Hume merely voiced logic. They slander him as narrow-minded. There is no real belief in miracles where people are merely assuming they happen and when they have to resort to lies to make miracles look like something that might be believed in by sensible people. Or worse should be believed in. It is as illogical to assume a miracle is true as it is to assume Cinderella is a true story. Presenting evidence only makes it more irrational not less because the evidence is not the reason you support the miracle stories. Your "faith" is based on assuming not thinking or on evidence.

And believers do not have the honesty to admit that if people met Jesus on the third day after his death and that is a miracle then that is all you can say. You cannot say you know or have evidence for what the actual miracle was. Maybe the miracle was that Jesus miraculously seemed to be dead and miraculously healed well enough to go out and meet his disciples again? Maybe aliens from 3000AD were given the miracle opportunity to heal him?

Hume never says, "If I see Jesus rise again and again and again I will not believe in this miracle." There is no refusal to examine evidence. Christians have to lie that there is because they need to discredit his wise reasons for neglecting to believe in miracles.

Hume right about testimony to miracles when there are no witnesses left. The best witness is the one who is there to be cross-checked. That is how strong the witness has to be to establish faith in a miracle event.

It is interesting that the Turin Shroud is seen as a miracle and it does not even have any testimony that it was in Jesus' tomb to justify this. Nobody seen the alleged miracle that made it. Hume talks about testimony to miracles but this is worse than any of such miracles.