

"I BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY BECAUSE IT IS IMPROBABLE"

Miracles like Jesus rising from the dead are part of Christianity. Christianity, the faith of miracles, says miracles are improbable. It says however that the evidence is good enough to justify believing in them. A miracle might be improbable but as you get evidence and testimony the probability that it happened increases. The improbability decreases. It can be very improbable that a testimony to a miracle is wrong. So if miracles are inherently improbable, there are other concerns that might reduce that improbability.

So evidence overrides improbability. Actually it is evidence that says a miracle is improbable. You weigh this against evidence that it happened.

At this point people talk about theoretical improbability. This is a fancy term for something that does not look likely. That is very subjective.

Evidence stripping away the improbability of something is not the same thing.

And if there is a theory, the miracle should be the one making the theory. "I am improbable but look how I happened." That avoids the subjectivity problem we met earlier.

So a miracle is only an issue for theoretical improbability if it says it is. But no miracle says that. Even Jesus didn't say, "Dead men don't rise but look how I did it?" He made no comment on whether people have started rising more than anybody in his company realised.

Theoretical improbability is outweighed by evidence when the evidence is sufficient and of reasonable quality. But that fact is actually irrelevant here.

We are not talking about theoretical improbability here at all. We are talking about evidence saying miracles are improbable and then evidence turning up that a miracle has happened. We are not theorising about what is probable but basing our belief in probability on what evidence indicates.

With everything that is reported, there is always misinterpreted evidence or absent evidence or overlooked evidence. No matter how good a witness is or how careful it will not be as good as seeing it for yourself. And that is the case for miracles and magic more than anything else.

Proving that something is plausible/probable is desirable but proving something plausible/probable does not prove it is true. A plausible/probable miracle is always under threat from a contradicting one that is equally or more plausible/probable. If miracle believers were honest the focus would continuously be on the evidence for plausibility/probability not on the miracle.

Evidence from a person who has manipulated evidence

If a fraudster gives you evidence it is possible the evidence is real. But because there is evidence he cannot be trusted it follows that the evidence has to be given the status of alleged evidence. This is not an ad hominem argument. Ad hominem means you attack the person making the argument not the argument. It is not that. It is evidence of untrustworthiness decreeing that the evidence may not be solid.

Genuine believers in miracles would attempt to verify and promote them regardless of any religious underpinnings. We would have Catholic books arguing that the pagan idol Ganesh drank milk (if it did) or that some breatharian really did manage to live on fresh air and was not trying to make a religious sign out of it. It would not matter what the miracle implies or says. They would just check it out and declare it plausible if it is indeed plausible.

Yet what you get is everybody choosing miracles to suit their prejudices and worldview and presenting them in such a way that it look as if the wonders are defending a specific religious system system or collective religious doctrine.

A miracle that is only promoted and defended because it can fit a specific religious worldview is being abused. Alarmingly that remains true even if it does seem to promote the miracle. Lots of miracles can look like or seem to support lots of different and contradictory religious ideas. The miracle is manipulated yes but it is really about manipulating the believers and the public.

A miracle should be checked because it is a reported miracle and for no other reason.

Science should be able to determine that something does not fit known natural laws. Religion by saying miracles have been verified is doing science. Except it is rogue science!

There is no evidence for miracles. There is only alleged evidence.

The Intuition that Strong Miracle Evidence is Needed

When there are two or more competing explanations of the available evidence, accept the explanation that is the simplest for the simplest one is most likely to be true and reject any inadequate ones. This is Occam's Razor. It is essential if one wants to be sane or stay sane. Life would be worse than Hell if we keep inventing explanations for things instead of seeking out the simplest explanation. Occam's Razor can only work if you stick with natural explanations.

Once you bring in the supernatural it becomes useless.

Once you discard the Razor, the potential for error becomes very great. People can apply the principle wrongly but the principle in itself is flawless. Even if the principle could make you err, not having it would make you err more!

Evidence is the only way to test what is said to be true. We cannot believe anything, not even revelation from God, without having some evidence for belief or grounds for belief.

David Hume reasoned that miracles are so improbable that we need to go beyond a normal amount of evidence to verify them or make them believable. Hard evidence is hard to get so it can be considered sufficient. It is not that normal though it does happen.

This is obviously correct.

Most believing people even in the Catholic Church have a weak belief in some miracles. They do not agree with Hume fully but they agree to a large level. They agree with him when they meet a miracle claim they do not want to believe.

Nobody agrees on exactly what was a miracle and what was not. Some Christians are suspicious of the resurrection of Jesus. People implicitly imply that testimony to a miracle is not enough and more is needed. Hume would have agreed.

Nobody believes in miracles for the exact same reasons as somebody else. The reasons are more important than the belief. Believing in the miracles of Lourdes because your parents told you they happened is really just believing your parents. It is trusting them not God. Hume criticised this kind of approach as superstition. It would not be superstition to believe in Lourdes if the evidence was satisfactory but to believe it on hearsay would be risky and superstition. If you believe the truth because of hearsay you are not honouring truth. Your reasons for accepting it are wrong. And tending to have the wrong reasons is a dangerous habit.

The person who believes the truth for the wrong reasons is no better than a person who believes lies for the wrong reasons. He or she is still not recognising the truth as truth. To see your mother when your glasses are distorted means you don't know if you really see her or not.

Those with any faith at all - little or large - may not hold on to it very long.

The vast majority of people do not take miracle claims as seriously as they do say claims that the VAT rate will rise etc. They agree with Hume more than what they may think.

What Hume reasoned is intuitive. Religion is trying to skew our thinking and feelings by brainwashing us to feel and see it differently.

You can't settle for an alcoholic's testimony that Charlie murdered Sheila. The testimony, however hard to lend credence to, is evidence but it is not enough. You need a better testimony than that. For example, the testimony of forensics that Sheila's blood was under Charlie's fingernail. The more serious and the stranger the claim the better the quality of evidence that is needed. And a claim coming from an alcoholic liar is a strange claim by default!

A religious claim is both serious and strange.

Religion says that when it checks miracles such as apparitions from Heaven, it ensures that the visionary really believes they are seeing Jesus or Mary or whatever. But that is not a clue that we should believe them. It may only indicate the

possibility that they are sincere - not that they are right. Sincere but incorrect testimonies were rife during the Jack the Ripper investigations in London 1888. Any piece of evidence for a miracle is not evidence for a miracle at all. It is only evidence for the faith and belief of the people involved in experiencing the miracle.

Hume said that we need miraculous evidence to justify believing. Evidence that is naturally good can only back up natural events. Evidence that is magically good is the only kind of evidence that can back up supernatural events. For example, if Jesus really rose from the dead we should find a miraculous CCTV recording of it preserved for us for two thousand years.

This would not be absolute proof. There would still be room for scepticism. But it is the very least we would expect in order to believe.

The case in favour of Hume then is watertight. But Christians try to undermine it nonetheless. If people in authority tell you often enough that the truth is to be doubted they can stop you feeling and seeing the full force of what Hume said. And Christians deploy that tactic. They desensitise themselves and others.

