

MIRACLES CANNOT BE BELIEVED WITHOUT EXCEPTIONALLY THOROUGH CROSS-CHECKING OF WITNESSES AND EVIDENCE

#Extraordinary claims require exceptionally thorough and detailed investigations. That is the rule for extraordinary natural non-magical claims - eg finding a dodo that has run off.

#A claim that could be magical - every miracle believer has to hold that if a miracle is not magic then it could be - and it needs the same treatment. It needs to be examined as an extremely unlikely natural event would be but there is something else too. You need to go to every length to eliminate any natural explanation.

#This makes it foolish to believe in miracles even if they are real as long as the case for the miracles isn't watertight.

#No miracle – indeed believers say that is true of most or nearly all– has great evidence.

QUESTION: Could, “Extraordinary claims require exceptionally thorough and detailed investigations” be faulty or wrong?

OBJECTION - IT DEPENDS ON WHAT YOU THINK IS EXTRAORDINARY

For everybody though a miracle is top of the list. And a healing of a wart miracle is less extraordinary than a man returning to life from the dead.

A vanishing wart is more miraculous than a runner racing so fast that it seems not humanly possible. Odd things happen in nature like our runner!

It is just a way of trying to ensure that facts or evidence cannot show the miracle false. It's a cheat.

OBJECTION: PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT IDEAS OF WHAT EVIDENCE YOU NEED IN THIS INVESTIGATION AND OF WHAT STANDARD

So? It just needs to be a very high standard with no gaps that is all. We can all agree on that much. We should agree on the principle and the big issues if there is conflict about the detail.

OBJECTION: THOSE WHO SEE THE MIRACLE HAVE THEIR EXTRAORDINARY EVIDENCE AND DON'T NEED TO INVESTIGATE.

This implies that we should just listen to the witnesses. After all if we want extraordinary evidence we get it from them or the investigators anyway. It is still us depending on others. This is really an argument for not bothering with an independent assessment or not really caring what it says and paying it lip-service. It makes it too easy for those with something to hide. Its selfish.

This objection does not respect witnesses and their believers who in fact do insist upon a tough standard of evidence and who think it has been met.

It is just a way of trying to ensure that facts or evidence cannot show the miracle false. It's a cheat.

OBJECTION: WHAT IS IMPROBABLE CHANGES FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT. I CANNOT REALLY KNOW IF IT IS IMPROBABLE FOR A MAN TO RISE RIGHT NOW FROM DEAD OR NOT.

This again is just a pro-credulity argument. If a miracle is trying to give us that message then it should be dismissed outright.

It is just a way of trying to ensure that facts or evidence cannot show the miracle false. It's a cheat.

We cannot function in life if we start thinking that though its improbable today for somebody to crack the safe code it will or could be probable tomorrow.

OBJECTION: WHAT IS BEYOND PROOF RIGHT NOW MIGHT DESERVE MORE CREDENCE AND BELIEF THAN OTHER UNPROVABLE THINGS

This is an argument for bias. We cannot know what to believe. This is about what we can believe. Arguments like that are irrelevant.

OBJECTION: SCEPTICS AND UNBELIEVERS IN THE MIRACLE ARE NOT HONEST SO THEIR DEMAND FOR EVIDENCE IS PATHETHIC.

The believers in religion and miracles accuse unbelievers who want good and better evidence of trying to set the bar too high so that no evidence or degree of proof will change their minds. The other side of that is that unbelievers are accused of setting the hurdle too low for things they don't want to believe. For example, they may use weak evidence and cling to it to deny the reliability of reports about some allegedly obvious miracle such as the Miracle of the Sun at Fatima. So unbelievers in the resurrection of Jesus for example who want bigger evidence are accused of having an unreasonable standard of evidence because they want to justify disbelief or unbelief. And when it comes to believing that the resurrection story was a mistake they don't want solid or heavy evidence then. Weak evidence will do.

This is purely attacking the unbelievers not their arguments. The fact is that this is not about people's motives. And nobody has the right to tell any person, "The evidence is great and you just don't want to accept it." How you think about and process and assess evidence is only something you can know. They are attacking you not the argument because they themselves doubt or disbelieve the argument they employ.

Believers think unbelievers rule out the supernatural in general or in any specific case. This is not true. They give it low probability. Sceptics can admit a miracle claim has merit but the problem is that there are problems that have merit too and the evidence goes both ways. Even if you think the supernatural is impossible, in the name of honesty and caution you have to consider it. And there is a huge difference between dismissing a miracle than in dismissing a story about a miracle. The latter in fact implies no necessary ideological bias. To reject a miracle story is no way the same as rejecting a miracle. To lock John out of the house for you think he is not there is not rejecting John. It is only rejecting him if you know he is there.

CONCLUSIONS

Extraordinary evidence for a miracle is needed because:

The real world serves us well - a miracle opens the door to saying that our senses may be wrong so that if you say there is a dog under your bed but some force prevents others sensing it you cannot be challenged. You say there is no proof at all that something does not exist no matter what it is. The suggestion is very serious indeed though it may be ignored. It needs dealing with.

All you will have left is a story.

Another matter is how fallible human nature is in testifying.

Another matter is how fallible it wants to be so it can believe things it likes.

Another matter is how fallible it wants to be so that can believe things to allay fear of the unknown. You may believe a miracle or religion not so much because it seems nice to but because you are afraid of not believing in case a God gets you for it or afraid of being left to think there is nothing supernatural that might love you or even save you.

Another matter is that a mistaken witness to a miracle get pressured to admit nothing when they realise they have made a mistake. [We know most apparition of Mary claims have to be untrue but the witness hardly ever admits it.] The evidence drowns any evidence for a miracle.

Another issue is that believers say the attraction of a miracle is how it shows the all-attractive and infinite love of God. So in that sense healing a wart off the nose of the world's kindest person is equal to a man rising from the dead for it is not the way it is done that matters but what is said. But that is not what they care about. They want gay cities burned miraculously and Egyptians drowned and men rising from the dead. Don't be fooled. Any trafficking with belief in miracles is driven not by virtue but ideology and vice.

Another matter is that people don't want to see the miracle - they don't want to be that sure. They want others to see it for them so that they can have belief systems that they like or are too prejudiced to drop.

Another matter is that nobody has any way of being sure that a miracle is a miracle – a trick by psychic powers is not a miracle.

Another matter is that since God uses revelation to communicate, his communicating to Annie and her telling us is not him

communicating. It is her and makes her his filter and mouth and is really trusting her not him.

Sincerity is not evidence. It demands evidence. It respects evidence. A sincere testimony can still be wrong.

There is a link between miracles and prayer. Those who pray declare themselves infallible, "My prayer is answered always – I got a dog instead of the car but God knew it was what I really wanted even if I didn't." With prayer you proclaim yourself infallible. It is just a way of trying to ensure that facts or evidence cannot show prayer is useless. It's a cheat. Prayer matters which is why miracle matters but prayer is anti-truth so the miracle is as bad.

For honesty and moral and truth centred reasons, we insist on a stringent standard for assessing miracles. Anything based on old books or hearsay is by default eliminated. Jesus' resurrection is not from God. Its a hoax or a lie or the work of stupid spirits.