

When Religion says no more than that Miracles are Possible

A miracle is an event that is not naturally possible. That does not mean it is necessarily impossible. There could be a power greater than nature such as a god that can do it.

To say its possible that a miracle has happened is to say it is possible that it has not. This is not belief. You need evidence that miracles happen or don't happen to be able to believe one way or the other.

What evidence then does the unbeliever need that miracles do not happen or are not believable? He has to go by the fact that he has never seen miracles. He has to go by the fact that non of his family or close friends - people he knows well have seen them and made a convincing report. The unbeliever has no choice.

Religion may say that if he is decent he will heed the testimonies to miracles though neither he nor those whom he is close to can provide such testimonies. But that is emotional blackmail. People have the right to dismiss even good testimony for good testimonies have been made that turned out to be false.

The Church says that though we have rational grounds for belief in divine revelation, reason cannot tell us everything. There are things that we cannot submit our reason to but only our ignorance. They want us to think but when thinking goes no further we have to use faith and religion to fill the holes.

Take miracles. Religion might say that if we should not submit our ignorance to irrefutable and convincing miracle claims, then we should submit it to nothing! Yet the Church tells us to have faith that the events really are supernatural miracles. We should submit our ignorance to the origin of all things but the Church says no and that we must accept the notion that the answer is that God made all things from nothing. Creation is a miracle and like all miracles, we should submit our ignorance if there is no evidence of fraud or error. By the way, there are no totally convincing miracles. Each miracle claim leaves room for doubting that it really was magical or supernatural. You cannot have evidence that a miracle happened. You can only have evidence that there was no fraud or error. That does not prove that the miracle happened. Catholicism acts as if it does. The Catholic Church's claim that miracles are signs from God to show it is the true Church is a shameless untruth.

Whenever a natural explanation for a seemingly supernatural event is available, it is to be preferred. Nobody disputes that. Atheists and religious people alike agree on it. Christians say that "doesn't entitle you to dismiss the possibility of miracle because as soon as you have a natural explanation for one strange happening, along comes another example which cannot be explained." But just because we are ignorant of the explanation does not mean the explanation is supernatural. It may be a natural explanation that we don't have. Sometimes facts are lost or incomplete or distorted and we may never be able to know exactly what happened. You don't say a magic trick was really a magical event just because you can't work out how it was done. Religious people are very biased. They become unfair in order to promote belief in miracles. And miracles if they happen serve to encourage their dishonesty.

The only thing you can absolutely prove is that you are aware now. And you can only prove it to yourself. Nothing else is as certain. Sceptics look at miracle reports that seem to have no evidence against them. They may say there is evidence that it is a real miracle but that the miraculous nature is still not proven. Evidence is not the same as proof. Evidence gives belief. Proof gives certainty.

Few Christians these days claim that God can be proven. They settle for saying there is no disproof of God and that there is evidence that indicates his possible existence. If God is proven then miracles are possible - though that does not mean they happen. If God may only possibly exist then miracles are possible albeit less possible than if he is really proven.

If it is possible that God exists, then it is possible - albeit less possible - that miracles happen.

The Christians who argue that Christianity and miracles are possibly true and not probably true are simply confessing, though they try to hide it, that the evidence does not support their beliefs. So they are really trying to explain the problem away. They are not the friends of evidence and honest inquiry that they pretend to be.

If you say a miracle happened, it is up to you to show that it did or probably did. To do that you must do three things. You must show that miracles can happen. You must show that the events possibly happened or happened. You must show that the events probably happened or happened. You must show that the events are miracles or probably miracles. That's a lot of work and means miracles have to stand up to a very high standard of evidence.

Miracles by definition are very unlikely. If they are not naturally possible then they must be rare. By naturally possible we mean something is likely to happen. We call something a law of nature when it seems to act like a law. We cannot say that it is naturally impossible for dead people to rise again all the time. If it is happening a lot then it is no longer naturally impossible. It's no longer the case that dead people stay dead. So it's naturally possible.

If we deny that miracles are unlikely then we are saying they are likely. Then it follows we shouldn't be saying the egg will be boiled in a few minutes. A miracle may happen to make it freeze instead. Life would be impossible. God does miracles to show that he can temporarily change the laws of nature. It is unfair to ask anybody to believe in a miracle unless the evidence is very good. It would need to be better than what you would need to convict a murderer in court. Nobody has the right to ask you to merely take their word for it that a miracle has happened.

If we say that we don't know if miracles are likely or not then it is presumptuous and arrogant to say that if I crash the car into a wall at 100 miles per hour I may die. And it is a lie. There are "moral" repercussions.

So believers have to start with the notion that miracles are rare and unlikely. What if they consider a case where a miracle supposedly took place?

- * They need to provide evidence that the witnesses are generally exceptionally honest and truthful.

- * They need to provide independent objective evidence that the miracle happened. Not having too much emotional investment in believing in the miracle would be important.

- * You can never prove that even the most truthful person on earth always tells the truth. So there will always be room for doubt.

- * We would expect the evidence for a miracle to be as good as the evidence that John F Kennedy was shot dead.

You can never prove that somebody is truthful as you think so the best you can do is say that you trust them and you accept their testimony but not necessarily to the effect that a miracle they report is to be taken as having occurred. You might take it as something that could have occurred. You will not trust your beloved wife who you have known for years if she says she experienced an alien abduction. And she won't blame you. There is nothing wrong with that. And we must remember, that all people lie and if you lie about the supernatural you are guaranteed to get away with it in the sense that nobody can prove it didn't happen. It is outside the test category.

Believers think they accept the testimony that a miracle has occurred when they actually think it may have occurred. There is a big difference between "has occurred" and "may have occurred."

And there is no such thing as a miracle that gives us evidence as good as the evidence for the murder of Kennedy. Again the evidence only points to the miracle being possible.

But possible is not good enough! It's possible that Hitler was in fact the holiest man ever and killed the Jews as a sacrifice for the human race to save us all from Satan. Where do you draw the line with supernatural possibilities?

Christians deny that we should only believe things when there is the highest degree of probability that they are true. For example, they say that we may think the sun will probably rise tomorrow but the fact is we don't know if it is probable or not. We cannot live or be happy if we stop assuming and acting as if we do know the sun will rise.

Their reasoning only makes it possible that miracles happen. It still does not mean we may believe in them.

Religion these days tends to argue not that a miracle can be proven to have happened but that it was possible. It often seeks evidence that a miracle could have happened not evidence that a miracle did happen.

Some miracles are less convincing than others. For example, we might believe St Bernadette that she saw some supernatural figure at Lourdes but it can never be proved that she was telling the truth about that figure. Maybe it was a fairy-woman and she lied that it was a being from Heaven, the Mother of God? A more convincing miracle would be Lazarus coming back from the dead if it really happened. An apparition is never as good as hard evidence for the supernatural.

The approach that it's possible a miracle occurred and that's enough endangers people. It gives licence to fraudsters to expect people to believe in their faked miracles as long as they are careful and manipulate the evidence. Miracle claims are not just about facts. They raise problems about protecting people from bad religion and fraudsters.

Religion says we must admit that the universe came from nothing so its existence is a miracle therefore we should have no problem in holding that miracles may happen.

It does not follow that miracles may happen if the universe is a miracle. They are possible but that still does not mean they may happen. In fact, the only miracle we would need is to recognise that the universe is a miracle! So the argument makes miracles less possible not more possible.

Getting evidence that people sincerely believe a miracle has happened is not the same as getting evidence that the miracle has happened. What about the people who believe miracles don't happen? The sceptics know their stuff better than uneducated believers who testify to miracles.

Christians deny that the wise person only believes things when there is good enough evidence for them.

Miracles by definition are very improbable.

The wise person will look for a lot of evidence in regard to miracles.

Believing that miracles are possible does us no good at all.

First of all, if it is possible that Jesus rose from the dead then its possible that the magic of Catholic baptism puts an evil occult force into a baby to influence her or him to accept the gospel according to the pope. We end up with no reality check.

Secondly, to say its enough to show that a miracle possibly happened denies that you need evidence that a miracle happened not evidence that a miracle could have happened. You need strong evidence that the magical took place. To say that you only have evidence that it might have happened is to admit failure. Even sceptics often say that Mary might have appeared at Lourdes and Jesus might have risen from the dead. They only say they find no adequate reasons for thinking these things happened. The believers might say Mary might have appeared and Jesus might have risen therefore we should believe. That is not logical.

Religion says sceptics say, "Miracles do not happen and nothing can ever show they do happen".

It objects strenuously to that view.

Yet it believes that nothing shows they happen. It might state it as, the evidence shows the miracle possibly happened which amounts to the same thing.

The believer says miracles are possible and some are true.

The unbeliever says that miracles are possible but saying this does not mean we will believe so we just do not believe.

It is obvious who is the most rational. The believer is the one making an assumption - that miracles happen. The unbeliever simply avoids unwarranted assumptions. He or she sticks to what is fair.

If the evidence shows that miracles happen it does not necessarily show which miracles in a set are miracles and which ones are not. If you know that miracles do happen, it does not follow that you must know what events are miracles. The problem then is if you cannot know what specific event is a miracle then what entitles you to say miracles happen at all? Believers are too biased to listen to.

Finally

The closest a believer in miracles can get to being rational is by saying that it is possible some event is a miracle. If miracles are possible, saying they have happened is still illogical for it is going too far.

Even if miracles are possible that does not prove or mean that any ever happened.

The notion, "I think the miracle happened because it is possible it happened" is fundamentally irrational and biased. It is not an argument but sheer lie.

A miracle is such a big claim that you cannot say, "Maybe it happened." Would you say it is possible that the Cinderella story with all its magic and the pumpkin turning into a carriage is possibly a true story? You need to be armed with strong proof. Believers cherrypick about what miracles are possible and what ones are not. It is about what they want to be possible not about what is possible. They cannot be taken seriously.

You cannot prove that there are no ghosts at all. You cannot prove that nobody ever rose from the dead. With these, you cannot prove a negative. Proving a negative and the null hypothesis must not be confused. The null hypothesis is just simply saying, "Whatever has happened here, we don't know what the cause is." The null hypothesis DOES NOT ask you to make possibilities such as demons being at work or whatever equal to natural possibilities. Possibilities can still be ranked in order of plausibility even if you don't know which of them is the right one. Where would we be if a baffling murder happened and we started saying, "Maybe we should just settle for saying that demons might have done it?"