

Is it reasonable to believe in miracles ever? Mostly or Rarely?

Some give witness to magical or miraculous events such as sudden healings that contradict medical diagnosis or visions coming down from the sky. Is it reasonable to believe such stories, ever?

THE CHOICE

If you want to try to believe in a miracle you may have this choice:

Accepting the miracle testimony as true. This is about the content.

Accepting that the testimony is the miracle. In other words, one of the reliable and honest and sane people in the world are telling you what your reason says has to be a lie. So their testimony itself is a miracle. Its credibility is a miracle.

Two different miracles. If you have to make a choice then which one?

Accepting that the testimony is the miracle is the one to choose for it is the obvious one to assume. If a statue really came to life and x didn't tell anyone what use is that? If you give their testimony credibility you would not give them if they said Godzilla was about to fall from the sky and land on you you are treating their testimony, that they said it, as a miracle.

We see now that there is an implicit miracle assumed when you accept a testimony to a miracle. So there are two miracles that are believed by you though you think it is one.

Miracles are seen as irrational to believe in. This is always about the content. It is said to be irrational to say for instance that Jesus could have risen for dead men don't rise. Now we have the problem of the miracle that the testimony is credible. It is obvious that you accept the miracle of the testimony you hear first and foremost and THEN you accept and direct yourself to the content.

This means that John telling you about Jesus rising is not connecting you to Jesus. The miracle you care about is John's testifying. Then IT HAPPENS TO BE ABOUT JESUS RISING. The claim that miracles connect you to God and to Jesus is definitely irrational. The claim that a testimony should be thought of as a miracle or treated as one - believers show they think of it as a miracle by their actions even if they don't say so - is flatly irrational.

That is settled then. Let us leave all that aside for the purpose of argument. Let us look at the debate as it is framed by most thinkers on the subject.

Those who believe in miracles seem irrational. Many say so. And many say that a believer in a miracle is not irrational for depending on a mere testimony because:

The person has a different way of being reasonable from the critic but that does not mean either of them is unreasonable.

The person through life experience has their own understanding of reason that works for them.

Wittgenstein says calling them unreasonable implies they are being rebuked. He says they should be described as not-reasonable.

Unreasonable means you defy reason. Not-reasonable means you are simply not in a position to apply reason.

That is fine in either case as long as they don't claim to be being reasonable.

Wittgenstein is evidently saying that believers may think it makes sense to get information from the Holy Spirit. So what they believe may be independent of any logical argument but is still reasonable in the sense that reason tells us to heed testimony, Reason cannot tell us everything which is why it directs us to seek testimony to fill the gaps.

The chaotic consequences that arise from such a notion as inspiration from the Holy Spirit show that it makes no sense. The Holy Spirit should not be included in the argument but banned from it.

We might be told that smart rational people believe the creation account in Genesis. But smart rational people think they believe things that they may not believe. They just have not taken the time to analyse themselves. And many of the smart

rational people are on the payroll of the Church.

We would consider a statue coming to life and talking to us for thirty seconds a great miracle. But what if we see an intelligent design behind seemingly random and non-supernatural things that happen in our lives? Is that any less valuable just because it is not so dramatic?

My thought: People who think that way do not always see the intelligent design as a good thing. Philosophers should not see people as rational who see a pattern. Seeing patterns and encouraging people to think they see them can be very harmful and misleading. Plus the patterns most believers look for are not about them but about other people. It is warped to tell yourself that the fleeting moments of happiness your dying child gets are part of God's loving plan for it implies the good has triumphed over the bad when it is actually getting worse. The brain invents patterns that are not there. Caution is needed.

It is irrational to see a pattern as a God's work for no matter what kind of universe you have, patterns have to be expected. And perceived patterns even more so!!

No matter what method you use to work out things that you consider to be true, in some cases at least all you have is experience. You can experience something that nothing else can support. All you have to go on is the experience. You have enough to fill knowledge gaps and to make theories without resorting to alleged divine patterns and talking statues and prompts from the spirit world.

David Hume wrote good refutations not of miracles but of their believability. To refute the believability is good but it implies more than anything you should not be promoting miracles to others and if you believe you should keep it to yourself.

Hume wrote lots of things that could if developed give further refutations of the goodness and rationality of believing in miracles. And he didn't write that he refuted the right to encourage belief in miracles.

Hume said that reason, our thinking power, is just about telling what seems true apart from what seems false and that "reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them." This terrifying blunt statement seems to say that we have to reason anyway even if reason is programmed by our passions. That is what he means by the ought. He cannot mean it really is a good thing to have feelings programming and colouring what you think. Thinking and feeling should be separate faculties. He sees the control of reason by the passions as an evil we have to live with. He argued that feeling miracles happen is not a reason for believing.

One way to deal with it is to say that the passion of love of truth is what keeps reason on the right track so in that way reason being controlled by a need or passion need not be a bad thing but in fact a good thing. There is a difference between this warning us to watch out in the wild for starving tigers and it telling us a miracle happened. A miracle needs great evidence and evidence coloured by feelings is ruined. It is so different from the norm that it is going to be 80% feeling and 20% whatever else while the tiger threat would be the other way round.

This ties in with psychology. Valerie Tarico in *Christianity is Not Great* outlines the research of Kahneman that in general "much of our mental activity has little to do with rationality and is utterly inaccessible to the conscious mind." So we are not the rational decision makers we might claim to be. We are seldom rational. Our devotion to God and the God of miracles is not as rational as it may seem.

David Hume has laid the rationality of miracle supporters to rest. One reason the testimony to a miracle is not enough to warrant accepting the testimony is that there is no reality check. You cannot look to see if the person is right. There is more to it than that. There is a psychological/personal issue. It opens the door too much for a person to lie to themselves or believe the miracle not because it is true but because they want it to be true. Without a reality check a person can believe or want to believe anything. The testimony to a miracle is accepted not because it is true but because it might be true and there is no way of knowing. Thus it is clear that even if a believer says they don't claim to be depending on evidence or good logic when they embrace a miracle doctrine, such as the resurrection of Jesus, as true they are lying. They are really in fact saying that something being possible makes it believable. It does not. It needs to be proven or probable. Possible is not enough. They are indeed using bad logic.

Miracles are superstitious and based on a bad attitude and by the fruits of faith in miracles you know its true colours. If miracles are attempts to override evidence that miracles do not happen then people of integrity cannot condone or enable belief in them. Many miracle accounts do indeed try to argue, "Okay this prophet or holy place has a lot of critics but rather than answer the critics point by point we have the miracle to answer them." Such an attitude leads to obviously fake miracle sites such as Achill Ireland House of Prayer getting away with it. No religion looks credible as a revelation from God without miracles. They might not make the religion credible but they help it to look credible. They are cosmetic. Could you imagine Christianity being as strong if it were merely a religion of wise proverbs and Jesus was just a preacher?

To dismantle the believability of miracles is to dismantle religion.

Everything about miracle claims dismantles those claims...

