



Does challenging superstition or faith protect people?
 Is it mistaken to support organised religion in membership or donations?

If people do good because they are human, not because God prompts them,
 is it right to risk giving God any credit when they alone own their good?



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THE CASE AGAINST MIRACLES, A LOOK AT THE GREATEST MIRACLE DEBUNKER OF ALL, DAVID HUME

John W Loftus the editor of this excellent anthology is an atheist author who has earned three master's degrees from Lincoln Christian Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Loftus, a former student of noted Christian apologist William Lane Craig, got some of the biggest names in the field to contribute to this book, which represents a critical analysis of the very idea of miracles.

Rather than define miracle, I think using the example of Jesus who supposedly died beaten to a pulp and nailed to a cross who rose again healthy and immortal three days later says it all. It shows what we mean. There is nothing you can say to one who sees this as magic and who does not waste time with the word miracle. Miracles tend to assume there is a God to do them in the first place. Now we are in the quandary of, "is it honest to say its not magic when God does it?" Answer is clearly no.

THE BOOK DEALS WITH DAVID HUME

The amiable philosopher David Hume found that we don't have good enough reasons to justify believing in miracles or taking them seriously enough to base religion on them.

He did not say miracles never happen. He in fact said that if somebody witnesses to a miracle then there are two miracles be weighed against each other

1 The miracle of this person being wrong or lying despite being not that kind of person

2 The miracle reported by the person.

"I weigh the one miracle against the other... and reject the greater miracle." The greater miracle is 2.

He said that all miracles come from testimony and it is not enough for it is always second hand. You cannot take a person's word for it no matter how reliable they are that the sun did not rise this morning. For Hume, you may only believe in miracles if the evidence is good enough but he says so far it never has been. Experience tells us testimony can be right but it also tells us that certain testimonies should not be believed no matter who gives them. So Hume sees a conflict where testimony must be not allowed to dominate the debate and drive to the conclusion.

The reasons there are no good evidences for miracles is that,

* falsehood or error can never been ruled out conclusively

* the unusual and rare can lead us to stupid and false beliefs. Surprise and the desire to believe leads to tall tales.

* miracle stories only appear among people that are already open to belief and a culture that wants such beliefs

* a miracle that teaches one doctrine is contradicted by another that denies it [Catholics say miracles show their infinite loving creator exists while Mormons - as good as - say miracles show that God is a mere man gifted with magical powers. An excellent example is how the Qur'an supersedes any prophet including its, alleged Jesus, and Muhammad by claiming to be the direct miracle word of God in written form thus contradicting the gospel Jesus who says he is the way and the truth and the life]

From that we see that you have to do a miracle on yourself - deny your thinking self - to believe. This is very demeaning when the miracle is not that important or trivial or even vulgar.

We should note that with testimony, the best testimony is cross-examined skilfully and then written down and the witness signs. You can have an objectively good testimony or deposition to a miracle even a false miracle. We don't even have such a deposition anywhere in the world! That is the kind of testimony you need to overthrow Hume. It is what you need before you should consider a miracle claim.

It never happens which says it all.

A QUOTE FROM THE BOOK ON HUME

The book says, "For Hume, evidence of the unchangeability of nature is absolute so that even if, for arguments sake, one had absolute proof for the occurrence of a miracle, this would equal the opposing evidence and imply that a miracle could not be asserted with any certainty."

In this view, Hume does not lead you to denial or dismissal of the miracle but to limbo. You have to leave the conflict if you cannot resolve it and just treat natural law as all that matters.

Don't assume that Hume cares if you are in limbo or disbelief in regard to miracle. He only cares that you do not believe.

If a miracle makes itself equal with the whole body of evidence that nature does not change then what? Is it actually a science problem not a religious one or one to do with God? Yes. As the Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy says a miracle is "an event that is not explicable by natural causes alone," it follows that a miracle needs you to have scientific knowledge and good knowledge at that so a miracle is a science matter and a possible challenge or threat to science. Perhaps there is a natural explanation for an alleged miracle and the reason I think I have seen a miracle is not because I did but because a miracle intervened to see me missing a natural explanation for it.

Now if a miracle cannot be certain and should be ignored as a challenge to natural law, then how much more if it is not just a challenge but a seeming act of God? Is this splitting hairs? No. Now we have two reasons as opposed to one for ignoring it.

To clarify, if nature is to be respected by suspending belief for miracle claims then if God has set up nature that is an additional reason to respect it.

Hume successfully argued that if you want to support miracles then testimony is not good enough for nobody is reliable enough or qualified enough to establish one. The book points out that critics who say this implies we cannot believe any history are wrong. That is too extreme and is just blackmail. Every historian rejects or ignores a number of things based on the data. No two historians agree exactly on what to reject or ignore. So rejecting a few miracles which are so rare anyway means nothing.

Testimony is taken to be about what it says. But it is more than just what it says. The fact is that when testimony itself says miracles happen it is also saying the opposite. You are not testifying that you know a miracle happened or that you can show or know that no mistake has been made. So broaden testimony a bit. There are the lines and also what is in between them.

LIARS CREATE THE DOCTRINES ABOUT MIRACLES

The book outlines the lies told against sceptics of miracles.

Hume has been lied about by theologian William Lane Craig who accused him of saying no evidence for a miracle is good enough which is unfair. Hume did say you should look at it first. All Hume argued was that testimony is not enough. The problem is that you need hard evidence to overcome the hard evidence that dead men stay dead for example.

CS Lewis accused Hume of saying merely that we know reports of miracles are false for they can only be false. That is not what Hume said at all! And would Hume need to write paragraph after paragraph if that was all he had to say?

I recommend that when you consider extraordinary claims need extraordinary evidence that you avoid arguments by defining the extraordinary evidence as good hard evidence.

Arguments from Christians like, "Where is the extraordinary evidence that you need extraordinary evidence for miracle claims?" "Where is the hard evidence that you need hard evidence for miracles?" This shows they are guilty of special pleading and only use corroboration for miracles as window dressing and don't really care if their miracle claims are true as long as people think they are. There is nothing wrong with wanting and needing proper support. And if you honour a claim you will honour it with the evidence it needs. The claim is the one making the demand not us. And what is wrong with us

making the demand as well? And while we are examining a claim we learn other things. For example, you learn more about medicine when you scrutinise an alleged healing miracle.

It is odd that religion which talks about faith in God actually means faith in the human testimony of others. It is about allowing others to define what you mean by God and God's truth. Miracles lead to superstition not God.

A GOOD POINT

Hume simply defined a miracle as that which nature could not do. His argument is not about what is supposed to be doing miracles such as God. What if he had written about miracle as in that which only God can do for nature cannot do it unassisted what then? It makes no difference to his position. It is about claimed miracles not what does them.

HUMILITY

One main thing that supports Hume is that miracles are always, "I saw God working to heal this person." "I saw Jesus in the Church." "I felt God's presence in me." This is a clear declaration of bias and of wanting to feel important. A humble honest person would say instead, "I saw the person get better and I have no explanation for that." "I saw a being claiming to be Jesus and I thought was Jesus in the Church." "I had a feeling as if God was in my heart." In other words, "I won't colour my experience with assumptions. I want the truth. This is for my sake as much as others." We read in The Case Against Miracles, "Correctly identifying X necessarily means you must know what X is, what established characteristics distinguish it from Y and Z". The experience is what people need to know about not what you think the experience is. Describe don't interpret.

Selfishness does not mean you are necessarily all about yourself as an individual. A devoted married couple can be selfish. A group can be riddled with and defined by selfishness. The individual may sacrifice for the sake of group selfishness. Selfishness is more dangerous and toxic when it is group effort.

Jesus said you must love God alone meaning be all for God in all things. Being all for God is just another way of being selfish. You give all your love to him and you help others not because they matter but because God does. That is selfish. People hate selfishness not because of the principle but because of what happens when one is selfish. Its about fear of the consequences and of how you don't matter in the eyes of the selfish person no matter what they do for you. The selfishness is a good explanation for why people want to believe in miracles and will deceive themselves and others over miracle mongers. The hate and the lies that pop up in defence of miracles shows selfishness simply HAS to be at work.

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

You park your car outside at night and in the morning you step into it. You believe it was there all night even if it was stolen and put back again. You cannot call any belief knowledge for knowledge matches what is true. Belief strives to be knowledge but is not knowledge. Assuming that miracles and the paranormal are possible means an angel could have been out in your car as well so makes the integrity of belief far worse. It is more respectful to who you are to drop all such theories and stick to the possibility that thieves took your car. At least it isis that time does not dcure o h naturally possible

CONCLUSION

Miracle claims are just attempts to validate and advertise theistic and religious ideologies. They involve fundamental dishonesty. They are threats to correct thinking and science. Also, Hume said that people lie even when they are honest generally which creates a problem with miracle testimony. Who knows if a miracle didn't lie then that Jesus rose when he is in fact still dead? If anything can fake a resurrection surely it is easier for the supernatural or the paranormal to do that as well?