

## THE SILVER BULLET AGAINST MIRACLES?

The main point of this discussion is that philosopher David Hume did not define miracles as violations of nature in order to say they cannot happen. He said that even if nature is not that fixed we still do not have enough evidence to take miracles seriously. This position rules out making a lot of miracles and basing religion on them. It does not rule out having a weak privately maintained insignificant opinion that a miracle happened for that is not in many meaningful way a belief. It is a modest sensible coherent view. Christians of course malign it for they base a whole religion on the allegation that Jesus came back from the dead as saviour by the power of God.

### WHAT DID HUME SAY?

Hume – are miracles, supernatural events such as those reported in the Bible, possible?

We cannot be sure but we should assume they don't happen for we are part of nature and we have a virtually unanimous perception that nature behaves in a regular uniform way. Dead men stay dead. Nature does not want to us to believe. Miracle claims then oppose nature and us.

Hume does not say that nature is strictly inviolable and his argument has no need for iron inviolability.

Hume – if miracles happen are any of them believable?

No – testimony is not enough to make it sensible to believe in the miracle. He hints that it is different though if you actually sense and experience the miracle. "Our evidence, then, for the truth of the Christian religion is less than the evidence for the truth of our senses."

Hume – if miracles happen can they tell us a religion is true?

No - he says one religion reports that its miracles are signs that it is true while one that says that religion is false reports miracles that it is the true religion.

Hume – is belief in miracles harmful: Yes! He debunked them as giving rise to "the most arrogant bigotry and superstition and free us from their impertinent solicitations. I flatter myself, that I have discovered an argument of a like nature, which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently, will be useful as long as the world endures."

If true then we should want to be protected from such belief. I ask for you to stir up a feeling why you need such protection. More to the point, SOCIETY needs to be protected for you are part of it and it is bigger than you. It is not clear if he is saying they are bad beliefs just because he thinks they are silly for or is saying they are bad anyway even if they do happen. In fact it must be admitted belief in miracles leads to a lot of trouble and its more than it is worth. Nobody dies from not believing in healers - healers should be able to cure without you noticing or believing - but people do die from running after healers. Suppose there are true ones. Why is there no proof the way you can prove antibiotics work? Who says that these supposedly true ones have not refused to send power to those who are not healed? What if they more that just did not help them but sent evil energy? You cannot assume somebody heals without saying they are potentially dangerous. It cuts both ways.

Hume never developed the point that being open to miracles risks you going down the wrong path for most miracle tales as even religionists admit are lies. He could have said, "God would not encourage belief in miracles when human nature is that full of duplicity." But when he said that it is wise to suppose that a miracle claim that is a mistake or convincing must then be a lie he hinted at that.

### IS HUME WRONG?

Christian: Nature cannot do miracles but miracles can happen so an event that nature did not, a miracle, then can be evidentially supported. Nature tells us that it did not so something. We believe in miracles because nature gives evidence that it could not do something that has happened. We deny that the evidence that dead men stay dead can overrule the evidence that there is an individual or rare exception: Jesus. God in his wisdom gave us the gift of nature, the gift of evidence and he alone does miracles.

Hume: Nature cannot do miracles but miracles even if they happen cannot be evidentially supported for testimony cannot be stronger than our senses which say that miracles such and dead people rising from the dead do not happen for the dead stay dead. "a weaker evidence can never destroy a stronger". The evidence of our experience cannot be overridden or overwhelmed by the evidence of testimony.

Question: is Hume simply refusing to admit that testimony at times is as good as seeing the thing for yourself? He is saying that the testimonies that the dead don't rise contradict the testimony of a few that somebody rose. If he is denying that evidence can show an exception then he is being unfair. But he is not. A testimony is not good enough as evidence. If a hundred people saw a miracle which said that the theory of relativity was wrong science would ignore it.

In his article on "The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective," William Lane Craig argues: "To say that uniform experience is against miracles is implicitly to assume that the miracles in question did not occur. Otherwise the experience could not be said to be truly uniform. Thus, to say uniform experience stands against miracles begs the question."

This is the bottom line. It is the one argument against Hume that you need to think about.

Uniform experience is not against miracles having occurred but against belief that they happened even if they did. In other words, it is about plausibility. Craig is misrepresenting. Hume was arguing against belief in miracles. Craig's version only talks of miracles that somebody says happened or noticed. Uniform experience could be against miracles but that allows for miracles happening on the sly.

"To say that uniform experience is against miracles is implicitly to assume that the miracles in question did not occur," needs to be rewritten. "To say that uniform experience is against miracles is implicitly to assume that the miracles in question did not intend to be treated .

If we are to start saying the real miracles are the secret ones then we destroy Christianity.

We don't need to be talking about literal uniformity but virtual uniformity. The Christians mistreat Hume's argument and the ones using circular reasoning are themselves. "Uniformity is rigid in the eyes of the miracle deniers for they want to deny miracles and we know they mean that for uniformity has to mean strict uniformity." Christians are begging the question in a bigger way than Hume for they are guilty of arguing that that virtual uniformity is enough to make miracles believable. That is not logical at all.

If both deniers of the believability of miracles and affirmers are guessing and messing about with logic then a miracle claim is still useless for building faith on. There is no way to decide one way or the other. All we can do is ignore the claims and concentrate on something else.

MAYBE THE MIRACLE IS NOT WHAT WE THINK!

What if the universal experience that nature is regular is the miracle? Perhaps nature is a mess but a miracle stops us seeing that? We cannot assume that its only a miracle when it is plainly one! Assuming that is bias: I assume that if a miracle is real then I will have perceived it as a miracle. Its only a miracle when I decide it is. Religionists pretend to be unbiased in finding that the evidence shows that a miracle has taken place. They have presupposed what a miracle is and are getting the evidence to fit.

If the universal experience and perception is a miracle then miracle is against miracle. The big miracle refutes the others for they are nothing in comparison. We can suggest that nature shows miracles should not be believed or suggest that the miracle of nature does it. Setting up nature and miracle like rivals must not lose sight of how basic miracle and any other miracle may be rivals too!

Options: Jesus rose. Nature is regular and dead men do not rise. Nature is a miracle of regularity and dead men do not rise. So Hume is wrong that there is just nature to worry about! Does that make the argument that the dead don't rise stronger? Yes.]

WHY OLD RECORDS ARE NOT THE SAME AS CURRENT FRESH TESTIMONY

Problem: Hume mentions scripture as a source of testimony of miracles and says it would be nothing remarkable if it is lying or mistaken but its too hard to think its stories are true. The problem is that if testimony could be good enough to show a miracle happened it cannot apply when there is no way to test the witnesses anymore.

We must realise that this is commonsense. It is not about miracles being true or false but about the grounds for believing.

We don't need to think nature is too regular to let miracles be credible to agree with him here. Believers themselves would not believe an old journal that turned up that said it was written by a witch who was able to send the Devil out to do mischief. If Hume is wrong about miracles he is not wrong about this. This has nothing to do with any argument that if somebody tells you they experience a miracle that they have the testimony of the world that nature does not change against them.

Nearly all miracle beliefs and there are billions of claims do not rest on fresh testimony. That alone says that if there is a miracle that deserves belief we cannot know when we find it.

## GRACE-FILLED MIRACLES ARE NOT THE SAME AS MIRACLES

In religion, God is bigger than nature when he is able to do things it cannot do. God if he loves us is working to make us better people. So unless a miracle is inherently a source of grace it cannot be considered to be the act of a loving God. Without that it is just ideology - "Oh I just want to prove you wrong!"

A miracle should be like God's kiss that changes those who experience it and are touched by it. For that reason, grace-filled miracles and miracles need different treatment.

One is spiritually and morally important. The other is as important as checking out some weird event such as a haunting. One is spiritually important and the other is not. The other is only for our curiosity.

Hume is proven right. If the dead stay dead then Jesus stayed dead regardless of the evidence that he rose if the resurrection is just for show and just a feat. Nobody rises from the dead just for an accomplishment. Science cannot function or trust anything if a major miracle is just for show for that warns there may be endless minor ones that tamper all the time.

If a miracle happens then the default or most natural assumption is that it is for show. We need reasons to see it as something different. A miracle can pretend not to be for show as another way of being for show. So the default view is that a miracle is just as unremarkable as the cat's ghost in the garden.

Christians are guilty of defining miracles into existence. They define miracles as conveyors of grace. This becomes, "A miracle is an act of God that brings us to being loving and just in a way that nature cannot make us. Any miracle that does not do that is false regardless of how good and reliable the testimony is." So the Christians agree with Hume after all but not in the way they think! No miracle story is directly or strongly linked with making us holy and good. No Christian says, "This miracle happened. I don't care about the testimonies and the evidence. I just see the changed life. I see what God has done in the witness."

## FINALLY

Seeing that nature is regular means seeing it as regular enough to justify disregarding (as opposed to dismissing) miracle claims. This is the testimony of evidence. The testimony of people about evidence is another testimony. The smoking gun speaks. So does the person who finds it. That is often treated as one testimony when it is two. Dismissing the miracle is not claiming to know it did not happen but claiming to know that it should be treated as if it did not or is uninteresting. Nature is to "blame" not us for it being right not to believe in miracles.

Hume asserted that nature being regular is enough to show miracles should be regarded as false. Strict rigid natural law that does not change is unnecessary. He asserted that the quantity and quality of miracle evidence so far could not match nature's reliability. He is not saying the quality and quantity don't have any value at all. Life is about weighing one evidence against the other. You would not be doing that unless you took both sides of the evidence seriously and as having some value.

The quality of evidence for a miracle or indeed anything matters more than the quantity. The quality of evidence does not mean you can show or know it is good quality. The trouble with quantity is that you will not know which evidence is quality and which is not. Luck and coincidence can make evidence look like it is good quality when in fact it is not.

If nature tells you x is a miracle, then a miracle asks for a high standard of evidence that surpasses evidence for a natural event. A man rising from the dead asks for evidence that nature could not do it and that it happened. A man staying dead does not need the same evidence because the evidence is not throwing up a challenge to nature.

Some say he said that nature is closed as a system and miracles do not happen. Others say he merely said that miracles even if they do happen are not believable for a lot of evidence stands against them – for example dead men stay dead which overrules the evidence that there was an exception. Others say that he was not dismissing miracles which have good evidence but was just thinking none he knows of were impressive. Christians find no problem with this soft interpretation. It is clear though that when Hume wrote that we should believe in a miracle if it would be more miraculous for the person to be lying or wrong than for the miracle to be real that he was talking about believability and was not saying miracles are just impossible. He was too smart to just assume the truth of what he knew he needed to show instead of just showing it.

If Hume is right and there is a God then it follows that miracles such as Jesus rising from the dead though they appeal to God are hypocritical godless superstition. But Hume's argument still works if you say nature is uniform enough. He is not begging the question. To say uniform experience is against miracles is not saying the miracle did not occur but saying it is not convincing enough even if the uniformity is not rigid. If natural law can be loose then we cannot be sure a miracle is ever a miracle.

If a miracle is not believable then if it has happened then it is not the action of a loving kind God of truth.