



[Home](#) » [Editor's Choice](#) » On Miracles

On Miracles

Gil Gaudia | December 23, 2014 | [Editor's Choice](#), [Kiosk Article](#)

In his book *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* the great Scottish philosopher, David Hume wrote about what some consider the “lemon test” for miracles. One of Hume’s most important points is to not be taken in by human testimony, especially “if the propositions being communicated are miraculous.”

In chapter ten, entitled “Of Miracles” (Note that my title avoids the charge of plagiarism by altering one letter.) he said in 1748:

No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless the testimony be of such a kind that its falsehood would be even more miraculous than the fact which it endeavors to establish ...

Hume concludes his point by saying:

When anyone tells me that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion.[1]

A miracle has to be something that really strains credulity. Common examples these days of claimed “miracles” include the survival of one or more victims of an accident such as an auto crash. Since these types of survivors number into the hundreds of thousands, it is hardly worthy of the word “miracle” to make such an attribution. After all, when we describe a miracle, we are talking about an event that defies or violates natural or scientific laws and frequently defined as “An event that appears inexplicable by the laws of nature and so is held to be supernatural in origin or an act of God;[2] or “an event that may be attributed to a supernatural being (God or gods), a miracle worker, a saint or a religious leader ...”; or “an effect or extraordinary event in the physical world that surpasses all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause”; or “an effect or event manifesting or considered as a work of God”[3]—or something like that. The mere fact of the frequency of “survival tales” removes them from any logical list of possible miracles.

Probably the most common example offered as evidence for miracles is the recovery or cure of someone who was diagnosed with an “incurable” disease, and these cures do occur. But they only occur when the disease or disorder has been known to also remit spontaneously in other circumstances, or when the “cure” is a medical possibility, e. g., some vaccination or injection causes the immune system to produce antibodies; or the body produces enough white cells; or the immune system responds to a disease that is coordinated by T-helper cells. These are all conceivable as a result of natural causes. In other words, the

body responds with reactions or the production of substances that it is already able to carry out. Cancers go into remission. People “dying” from pneumonia have been known to recover.

On the other hand, amputated limbs do not regenerate. If you had to decide which of two events could have been the result of a miracle, would you choose the story of a cancer going into remission or one about a regenerated limb? If you heard a story about a person who recovered from a fatal diagnosis such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis and one who had regrown a limb, lost, perhaps, in an accident, which would you regard as closer to the meaning of a miracle? Most rational people, including religious believers, would say the latter, and the reason why is simple: everyone knows that there is no recorded example in the medical literature of a human (unlike frogs) spontaneously regenerating a limb; only a miracle could possibly regenerate a leg blown off at the hip, say, by an IED, to cite a common recent occurrence.

But if miracles are really possible, would there be a limitation to what God, who allegedly carried out the miracle, could do? Philosophers have posed this question for millennia and have had to resort to paradoxes in order to devise a limitation on the power of an allegedly *omnipotent* being, one of the most classic examples being “could God create a rock too heavy for himself to lift?” One reason why it is so difficult to conceive of God being unable to do anything, aside from these absurdities posed by philosophers, is that the alleged Power of the most unimaginable magnitude has already done it all.

This Power was presumably the creator of hundreds of billions of galaxies *ex nihilo*, (out of nothing), which are composed of hundreds of trillions of stars, dotted with singularities and “black holes.” All of these were endowed with gravity and, in the case of the “singularities,” with crushing annihilatory densities.

Spectacular elliptical orbits were “designed” over a time-and-distance span of almost 14,000,000,000 (fourteen billion) light years; in the meantime, this Power had already established astonishingly complex molecular systems, composed of amazingly intricate atomic foundations.

All of these systems operate according to the mechanics of gravity, electromagnetism and other little-understood forces that bind atomic nuclei together while incorporating swarms of electrons that maintain their balance around their stupendously dense centers in microscopic imitation of the grander galaxies. In addition, this Power has supposedly orchestrated the rules of light propagation and spectrums of colors all arranged in fantastically diverse, visible as well as invisible, wavelengths and patterns.

This Power has also, (and most relevant to the question that follows), created biologic systems from algae to *sequoia giganteus*, from amoebas to human brains.

Would it be asking too much of this Power to create a single leg?

If biologists, who are currently working on this possibility, (that is, the regeneration of body parts from mitochondrial stem cells) eventually do succeed in making limb regeneration occur, who would get the credit? Would it be the scientists or the creator of miracles? Any atheist already knows the answer that apologists would come up with: “God made it possible for the scientists to develop the technique.”

I am reminded of the Christian doctor, Kent Brantly, who was recently transported from Africa to the United States after contracting EBOLA, and who having recovered, talked about “his faith in God” (for his recovery). He said, “I am growing stronger every day, and I thank God for his mercy as I have wrestled with this terrible disease ...”[4]

The good doctor failed to mention the countless human beings who helped God make his recovery possible beginning with the 19th century scientists (I will ignore the previous couple of thousand years in ancient Egypt, India, China and Greece) who paved the way in medicine, from Louis Pasteur, Joseph Lister and

Robert Koch, to name a few of the more prominent names I remember from Biology 101; the scientists, inventors and engineers beginning with Wilbur and Orville Wright (Again, ignoring people such as Leonardo) who made it possible for him to fly like a bird the 5,281 miles from West Africa to Atlanta Georgia—to say nothing of all the doctors, nurses, lab technicians, aides, ambulance drivers, etc., who made their contributions to saving his hide.

If there is anything inexplicable in all of this, it is the extraordinary ability of people like Dr. Brantly, with education and (presumably) intelligence who can contrive a twisted reason that ignores tons of evidence to the contrary in order to support an infantile explanation of their reality.

Now, that is something that really strains credulity.

Notes

[1] Hume, David; *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Chap 10; 1748.

[2] thefreedictionary.com

[3] *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*

[4] NBC News, August 14, 2014

all rights reserved

[Gil Gaudia](#) | December 23, 2014 | [Editor's Choice](#), [Kiosk Article](#)



© 1995-2025. Internet Infidels®. All Rights Reserved.
« [disclaimer](#) » | [Privacy and Cookie Policy](#) | « [site map](#) »