

### **Thomas Aquinas Miracles:**

“That which has divine cause, not that whose cause a human person fails to understand.”  
(Book: *Summa Contra Gentiles*)

- **Thomas Aquinas:** (1225-1274 CE)
  - Offered similar definition to defining - ‘those things... which are done by Divine power apart from the order generally followed in things’.
- **There are 3 types of miracles: (events done by God)**
  1. ‘Those events in which something is done by God which nature could never do.’
  2. ‘Event in which God does something which nature can do, but not in that order.’
  3. ‘When God does what is usually done by the working of nature, but without operation of the principles of nature.’
- Aquinas allowed the possibility of miracles to occur *within* the ‘system’ of ‘natural activity’.
- He also allowed for the possibility of God’s activity with the natural realm, may be part of normal order of things.
- **Raises the question:** God acting within the *normal order of things*, how do we know when (or if) a miracle occurred?
- **Example:** Taking medicine – would that be the work of God taking a medicine to be healed?
- **What Hume says about Aquinas’ Miracle?**
  - **Quote:** “Miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.”
  - He uses Aquinas’ example (*Jesus curing the paralytic*)
  - This event breaks the law of nature. Carrying this activity is unlikely because that’s not how nature has made it therefore it is impossible.
  - Hume rejects the idea.
- **Point 1:**
  - Aquinas highlights religious believers’ basic point.
  - Miracles are events caused by God.
  - Latin word “Miraculum” – an object of wonder.
- **Point 2:**
  - Aquinas’ idea came from Aristotle.
  - Both Aquinas and Aristotle believed which everything exist had a nature.
  - Nature (*they define as*): Ability of something; what something can do.
  - **Example:** The difference between human and animal nature. Human can think of the future and the meaning of life and death.
    - Divine Cause = Miracle- Events are not normal part of the nature things.
- **Hume's example explaining law of nature:**
  - When throw a book off your desk, it falls on the floor. Cause: Gravity.
  - Tested when evidence to demonstrate. To a paralysed person- there is no evidence.
  - Use the miracle story in the Bible. Aquinas focuses of Hume not having any evidence to prove his explanation in which to he is all about proof.
  - Nature is fixed and rigid as the laws of nature are unchanging.
- **“Miracles can never happen.”**
  - From Aquinas’ definition- the divine cause is God and the definition is use as a reflection of the Bible miracles.
  - Therefore, it is incorrect according to Aquinas to say miracles could never happen.
  - Hume’s definition states miracles are violating laws of nature; instead, people explain the world around them by the intervention of God.
  - So, issues of miracles are interpreted differently depending on our knowledge of the world.

### **Richard Swinburne Miracles:**

- **David Hume:**
  - “A transgression law of nature.”
  - What for? People lie, good reasons = benefits
  - Societies aren’t awed by what they know to be natural events.
  - Miracles - Testimony; ‘violation of the law of nature’ = fixed and unvarying.
  - Lack of understanding of Science.

- **Richard Swinburne: (*Theist*)**
  - He calls it 'counter instances to a law of nature.'
  - Happy to accept evidence.
  - "Not breaking the rules, just not following it."
  - Book: "For the Possibility of Miracles."
  - Evidence does exist that miracles can occur evidence does exist miracles cause God.
- **Do Miracles Violate the Laws of Nature?**
  - 'Probabilistic' – laws of nature are actually describing what will probably happen.
  - Could happen – unlikely.
- **Swinburne's evidence as proof for the existence of miracles in 2 steps:**
  1. - He questions whether there could be evidence of a violation of natural law.  
 - Swinburne asserts that something occurring that defies prediction based upon natural laws does not automatically constitute a miracle.  
 - He argues that the event must also be non-repeatable under similar circumstances, for if an event can be repeated we would have to institute a new law of nature or, at least, revise the existing law to include an exception under certain circumstances.  
 - Swinburne concludes that if an event defies the laws of nature as we know them and we are unable to revise the laws or create new ones that will consistently predict similar such events, then it is a miracle.
  2. - The second aspect of Swinburne's argument relates to proof. Contrary to Hume (*who argued that proof would be testimony of witnesses which would be finite*)  
 - Swinburne argues that historical proof for a miraculous event would consist not only of testimony of witnesses but also a study of the effects of said event.  
 - He claims that one would have to experiment to see what other event, if any, could have caused the same effects.  
 - Thus, for Swinburne, proof is easily infinite.
- **Jeanne Fretel's Story:**
  - Had Tuberculosis = Cured, Grotto, Roman Catholics and Virgin Mary appeared.
- **Hume:**
  - Had not properly observed before and after event.
  - Story repeat. "nonrepeatable counterinstance to a law of nature."
  - Not properly seen with the technology.
  - Misguided.
  - If the testimony of a miracle were overwhelming (say all the witnesses are honest, well informed, and you saw the event yourself) why not say that you have good evidence the miracle has occurred?
  - Some possible miracle events liable to *personal* explanation.
  - If you have independent evidence that God exists, you have possible compelling evidence that a given event is indeed a miracle.
- **Swinburne: (*Bending not breaking*)**
  - Testimony of doctors, witness and Jeanne = important.
  - Does not rule out miracle.
  - A good reason to dismiss the story.
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- **Examples:**
  - The miracles from the Bibles such as [Parting the Red Sea, healing the blind man] are allowed by Swinburne to be called a miracle.
  - They are based from evidence at which he is content about it.
  - Though, natural laws or likely events- he couldn't accept as miracles.

### **Paul Tillich Miracles:**

- **Paul Tillich**
- Quote: *'Miracles are astonishing, but without contradicting the rational structure of reality.'*
- Book: *"Systematic Theology I"*
  
- Believes miracles reveal something about God's nature. (*E.g. Raising Lazarus from the dead.*)
- Shows the nature of God as all-loving (omnibenevolence).
- However, argued if God is all-loving then why He doesn't save the other people as well. Maybe he has favourites and takes the thought away of being equal.
  
- **Definition:**
  - Miracles cannot be interpreted in terms of supernatural interference in natural processes.
  - Also, he argues that miracles should not be defines as violation of the laws of nature.
  1. A genuine miracle is first of all an event, [unusual without contradicting the rational structure of reality.
  2. An event which points to the mystery of being, expressing relation in different way.
  3. It is an occurrence which is received as a sign-event in an ecstatic experience.
  
- **David Hume:**
- Quote: *'A transgression of a law of nature.'*
- Believes people shouldn't believe miracles.
- How would you know that the person is lying or just wants attention? Basically, must not believe something you haven't seen or experience before.
- Believes that miracles such as Jesus curing the paralytic is an example of even which suggests that something happened which broke laws of nature.
  
- **Examples:**
- Paul considers miracle from the Bible or events happened such as:
  - Moses parting the Red Sea: Reveal's something about God's nature- omnipotence.
  - Jesus making blind man see: Shows all-loving for healing the man – omnibenevolence.
- And any other more which can be considered to be on God's nature for his miracles to occur based on Paul's understanding. He believes not all miracles can break the law of nature.

### Miracles and David Hume: (Unreasonable Belief)

- **David Hume:** (biography)
  - Born: Scotland, 1771; Death = 1771 age of 65 (bowel or liver cancer)
  - 18<sup>th</sup> Century Philosopher
  - Epistemic person - emphasis on experience and the observations of the world.
  - Mitigated sceptic - doubts everything.
  - Personal views on religion- difficult in England considered charges of infidelity
  - Ambiguity.
  - Not declaring as an atheist. He hides his feeling; rather not confirm or acknowledge his works until close death.
  - Unhappy because of the religious views.
- **Miracle:** – Latin = “*Miraculum*” –object of wonder.
  - May mean other things= pointing directly to God or a lucky event.
- Hume defines Miracles- ‘Transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of deity.’
- E.g. Jesus walking on the water.
- He believes that miracles are the only possible support he would allow theistic people to believe in.
- **Hume's definition of miracle:** A miracle must meet two conditions:
  1. - It is a *violation* of a law of nature. It cannot be the result of any natural process.
    - It is not enough that the event in question be astounding or unusual.
    - If it turns out that Jesus used a sophisticated "trick" to change water into wine, it might have still been impressive, but it's no miracle.
  2. It is caused by a direct divine action. The event can't just be an anomaly.
- **Hume's two arguments: Probability and Validity**
  - **Probability:**
    1. Evidence collected. (Human witness)
    2. Laws of nature appear to be fixed and unvarying.
    3. Miracles violate law of nature.
    4. Conclusion: Miracles happening incorrect that law of nature have been violated.
    - Hume argues that the probability of miracles happening is so low, likely won't happen. Even if they did then we shouldn't believe in them, due to needing proof of it happening.
    - He believes that if something is 'true' it is probable and if something is 'false' then it is improbable.
    - Hume really only relies on probability to conclude if miracles actually happen.
    - **Conclusion:** Maxim. ‘There is no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be such a kind that its falsehood would be more miraculous than the fact which it endeavours to establish.’
- **Example:** (Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead)
  1. Bible = Witness of the event.
  2. Humans cannot rise from the dead.
  3. Conclusion: Confliction between a law of nature and miracle story.
    - = For Hume the question would be: *Which is more likely: a law of nature has been violated, or the eyewitnesses are for some reason mistaken?*
      - Occam's Razors: [explanation] =Choose simplest option.
  - **Validity:**
    - Humans are ignorant and barbarous (*uneducated and uncultured*).
    - People enjoy relating miracles they heard without caring the veracity.
    - Some would lie = Benefit their religion.
      - = Fame they receive.
    - Higher educated and Philosophers = miracles not happening.
    - No convincing testimony from educated people.
    - Conclusion:
      1. If one religion claimed that a miracle proved that their religion was true
      2. The value of this statement is cancelled out by the fact, and then all other religions equally claim miracles happen to prove the truth of that religion.
      3. Conclusion: The stories from the bible are false than that they actually happened.

- **Criticisms of Hume's definition:**

- Hume's conditions are not *sufficient*. In addition to Hume's two conditions, a genuine miracle should exhibit the following two conditions.

1. A miracle is a surprising event.
2. A miracle serves a beneficial purpose.

-- Hume's reply: These might well be conditions for our *recognizing* a miracle, but surely something can *be* a miracle whether we recognize it or not.

- Hume's conditions are not *necessary* (Holland's objection). We are prepared to apply the concept "miracle" to many events that clearly violate no natural laws.

- a. Tillich: Miracles are *sign-events* that point to the mystery of being in its relation to us. Miracles are events that must be [1] astonishing, unusual, and shaking, and [2] do *not* contradict the rational structure of the world.

-A reply: One must distinguish fortuitous events from genuine miracles.

- **Hume's argument against miracles:**

- The evidence from experience in support of a law of nature is extremely strong.
- A miracle is by definition a violation of a law of nature.
- The evidence from experience against the occurrence of a miracle is extremely strong.

1. Hume's argument is *not* that miracles never occur. Rather, his point is that there can never be sufficient grounds for *believing* that a miracle has taken place. That is, his argument is *epistemological* rather than *ontological*.
2. Defense of Hume's argument: Suppose someone told you that they saw a car floating in the air. Assuming there's no violent wind, etc., this violates the principle of gravitation. That principle has been repeatedly confirmed in your experience (and in everyone else's too!). Thus, while testimony is generally reliable, it cannot overcome the likelihood of the law of nature.
3. Consider the following example: Suppose you throw your philosophy of religion textbook in the air and it floats in the air for several minutes before slowly returning to you opened to section on miracles! There are three possibilities:

- The event was caused by some other natural forces (*winds, etc.*). In this case gravity has not been violated = Obviously, no miracle.
- The event violates the law of gravity but nevertheless, has natural causes. This means our law of gravity is mistaken = Still, no miracle.
- The event has no natural causes at all. The event is not falsification of the law of gravity, it is a violation of the law (*that law only tells what must happen only if caused entirely by natural forces*).

- This is a miracle, in Hume's sense. The problem is you can never believe this took place, according to Hume.

### Maurice Wiles Miracles:

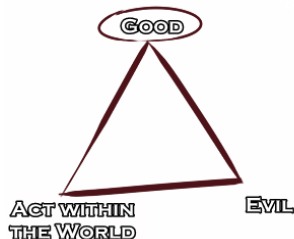
- **David Hume:** "*A transgression of the law of nature by particular volition of deity*"

- **Transgression:** means a violation of law, command, sin.
- Miracles occurred whenever God causes a law of nature to be broken, because a miracle is a violation of the nature law.
- David Hume is a mitigated sceptic (doubts everything, even miracles).
- David Hume said that we should not believe the people who said that they have seen a miracle occur as there is not enough proof, rather than not believing that miracles exist.

- **Maurice Wiles:** (1925- 2005)

- Theologian of Religion.
- Theist = Different understanding of traditional beliefs. Does not see the concept of God.
- Wiles reject the idea of God acting in the world and violation of laws of nature.
- **Arguments against Miracles:**
  1. If Miracles are violation of the laws of nature, they have to occur infrequently to avoid the law of nature becoming meaningless.
  2. The patterns of the occurrence of miracles appear strange.
  3. The large numbers of Evil event are not prevented by God raises questions about God's Goodness and Omnipotence.
- **Miracles:** *An effect or extraordinary event in the Physical World (Natural World) that surpasses (go beyond) all known human or natural powers and is ascribed to a supernatural cause.*
  - Some traditional views of a miracle are:
    - *It is a sign pointing to God.*
    - *A lucky event.*
    - *A coincidence.*
    - *An event that breaks the law of Nature.*
    - *An event that reveals God.*
    - *A natural event that is given a special meaning by someone.*
    - *God's direct intervention in history.*
- **Evil:**
- Wiles argue against the idea of God which acts in the world and is good why did he not prevent disasters? (Famine, Holocaust, World wars etc).
- Many people believe that God is Good and Omnipotent so then why does God not intervene?
  - Many people believe that there is a contradiction between the numbers for those who are saved. One person being healed comparing against events like tsunamis and famine where thousands die.
- Wiles implied that the view of God who acts in the world and works miracles causes difficulties for religious believers associated with the problem of evil. This links with the idea that God acts in a particular way in response to prayers.
- (Does this mean that there is a level to miracles? The more you pray the more likely a miracle will happen to you?)
- **Criticisms of Wile's view:**
- **Christian Traditions:** States God acts in the world in a direct way, the Bible shows this. However Wiles thinks that the biblical stories hold symbolic meaning but not the truth.
- **Human rationality:** Wiles argument depends where human rationality can be applied directly to God. Questions about God's actions being have to have sense in our understanding, however for some God cannot be limited to what is rationally possible.
- **The Christian God:** John Polkinghorne argues that Wiles' view does not reflect Christian religious experience of God. It is difficult to make sense of the idea of of Petitionary prayer (a prayer that makes a particular request to God)

**PETITIONARY PRAYER - ASKING**



- **Miracles Maurice Wiles Definition:**
  1. Miracles can never happen, he does not believe in the concept of miracles.
  2. Believes that the act of creation as a whole is a 'miracle'.
  3. The only thing possible that could be considered as a 'miracle' is not a miracle from God as he believes that God does not act in the World.

4. Therefore does not violate the laws of Nature, which is according to Hume is the only thing that could define a miracle.
- **Wiles' Solution:**
    - Whole universe creative act of God.
    - Universe itself as a whole reveals God to people and God's activity is present.
    - Believes that God should not be seen playing an active role.
    - "The whole world as a whole is a single act of God."
    - Intervene => causes trouble.
    - Trivial Miracles => God chooses randomly.

#### **Richard Dawkins Miracles:**

- **Richard Dawkins:**
- Book: "*God Delusion*" – argues that the truth or falsehood of miracles is unequivocally a scientific question.
- "Temporary violations of God's otherwise grandly immutable laws"
- His definition is a sloppy expression.
- If a miracle were a violation of the laws of God it would not fall within the purview of science which, Dawkins vociferously asserts.
- From definition of Hume's [ "*a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent*" ].
- Dawkins states a question: Does this captures the notion of miracle as it used in religion?
  - It suggests it does not.
- **Miracles:**
- Suggests that alleged miracles provide strong reason to many believers for their faith.
- Examples: The virgin birth, raising Lazarus from the dead and resurrection of Jesus.
- Arguments: Necessary and Sufficient
  - **Necessary**: it is not a necessary condition for X to be described as a miracle that X is a transgression of the laws of nature.

- Majority of miracles comprise events that fit description but not all.
- Example: In the Old Testament, God intervenes to harden Pharaoh's heart and also arranges the military campaigns of the Assyrians to achieve his e.g. to punish the Jews for the disobedience.
  - In these cases, nothing extraordinary about their behaviour- what makes their behaviour miraculous is that, while to the unknowing observer Pharaoh etc. are acting as they normally do
  - In fact, they are merely the instruments of God.
- **Sufficient:** it's not a *sufficient* condition for X to be described as a miracle that X is a transgression of the laws of nature.
  - The Bible acknowledges that there are practitioners of magic who provoke wonder among people but denies that their powers come from God (e.g. Acts 8.9-11)
  - Marvels are **not** miracles. (*Story: Simon practiced sorcery amazed people of Samaria. Boasted and got attention, said to have 'Divine Powers', therefore, followed him for his magic.*)
- Miracles: Ordinarily God's action in the world is mediated- through liturgy, scripture, prayer, our encounter without neighbour or the beauty of the world. But in miracles, God intervenes in the world directly.
  - The reasons given in the Bible for such direct interventions are quite various and cannot attempt a comprehensive account here. However, if we consider the gospels only, we find that Jesus performs miracles that he is the one referred to in the scriptures (*Luke 7.21-23*) to Isaiah.
  - Elsewhere he cures blindness to show that he has power over sin; and in stilling a storm he asserts a traditional power of God over the elements thus suggesting that he is of divine origin.
  - He rejects requests to work miracles when the request is merely a request for magic.
- Miracles since the time of Hume, interest has centred on the apologetic role of miracles- their role in proving that Christianity was established by God. One of the decrees of the First Vatican Council is as follows:
 

*"If anyone says that miracles can never be known with certainty, nor can the divine origin of the Christian religion be proved from them: let him be anathema."*

  - This decree (objectionable as is the appended anathema) account found from New Testament. If what is at issue is the divine origin of Christianity as against (e.g. *Jews who might doubt that Jesus was the one whom God had sent.*)
  - However it is inconsistent with the notion that miracles establish the existence of God since miracles already assume that God exists and is active in the world. Dawkins is thus wrong in suggesting that miracles provide a warrant for the faith of believers – rather, they are constitutive of that faith.