

Proposal for Graduate Research Symposium

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Topic: Habermas vs Hume: An Argument for the Possibility of Miracle

Department: Philosophy

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David Hume, an eighteenth century empiricist, skeptic, and a widely acclaimed *philosopher of the Enlightenment*, formulated one of the greatest modern critique, against the reliability and plausibility of religion in general and Christianity in particular in the modern era of philosophy. During his time, religion depended mainly on the testimonies of miracles and it was probably taken for granted that miracles, an ancient religious tradition, was never considered to be an ideology whose truthfulness could be doubted or denied. But Hume, being a skeptic, argued against not just the possibility of miracles but also the truthfulness of the various testimonies and miraculous claims in history. While Hume continues to argue against the possibility of miracles, Christian and theistic philosophers who believe in the historicity and possibility of miracles have also made effort to respond to some of the philosophical questions aimed at denying the possibility of miracles and the plausibility of religious beliefs in general.

Hume defines a miracle as an event that is rationally and practically improbable. In his article titled, *Of Miracles*, he defines a miracle as “the violation of the laws of nature.”<sup>1</sup> Logically and metaphysically speaking, an event that can only be brought about by the violation of the laws of nature is such an event that might as well require an obstruction to the universal and an unalterable natural order. From the very nature of this definition, a miracle is not just improbable but its effects, upon which sets of belief system rests, is false. According to Anthony Flew, Hume developed this critique to establish that “a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion.”<sup>2</sup> The implication of this submission is that it might question the authenticity of the true revelation of the Christian religion and also “abort the rational apologetic for a revealed religion.”<sup>3</sup>

Gary Habermas, among other Christian (theistic) philosophers, vehemently refutes the Humean definition of a miracle and also argues against Hume, demonstrating that his argument is inconsistent and begging the question. Gary Habermas opines that a miracle is not a violation of natural order or laws. He argues that the process that brings about miracles does not violate the laws of nature but rather supersedes it. He redefines a miracle as a process whereby the

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<sup>1</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 3d ed., rev. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1975), p. 115

<sup>2</sup> Anthony Flew, *Neo-Humean Arguments About The Miraculous*, In *In defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997) 46., and Richard Whately, *Historic Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon Bonparte*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London: George ROutledge & Sons, 1890

<sup>3</sup> Flew, *Neo-Humean nArguments About The Miraculous*,

natural law is being superseded through a supernatural agent.<sup>4</sup> A miracle is an event whereby God “temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting.”<sup>5</sup>

Over the years, arguments on miracles have provided platforms where reason combines with faith to address cogent religious matters. It should not be mistaken that miracles should meet all philosophical criteria for its rationality because it remains a religious matter that should not lose its religiousness. In other words, of what importance is a miracle if it only meets philosophical requirements and loses its religious significance? Using Habermas’ argument for the historicity of resurrection, this work will argue against Hume’s denial of miracles and his naturalistic interpretations.

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<sup>4</sup> Gary, R. Habermas, *The Risen Jesus and Future Hope*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003.) 5

<sup>5</sup> Douglas, Geivett, R. and Gary R. Habermas, *In Defense of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God’s Action in History*, (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997). 62-63

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