

Hume's Argument Against the Miraculous and Theistic Rationality.

David Hume's argument in the seminal 'Of Miracles' concludes in stating that it is always irrational for a person to believe in the instantiation of the miraculous. Following from this Hume states that theistic belief can never be epistemically justified and that for person to do so s/he must resort to fideistic strategies.¹ Hume's argument in his essay is in fact a variegated one arguing for the irrationality of belief in any miracle and the second a group of *a posteriori* arguments arguing for the lack of evidence regarding past purported miracles.² It will be the claim of the first argument on which this paper will concentrate. This paper will argue that, on the correct reading, Hume's argument is coherent and that faith in a supernatural power may be foundationless given the assumption that the wise man is external to the events he is evaluating. However, if this assumption is not granted and the wise man is a witness to the alleged miracle then he may be epistemically justified both in his belief in the actuality of the event and his theistic convictions.

It should be noted that this paper will have one major limitation. Hume, (127) argues that a "miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion". This must include a study of the arguments of part two of his essay, which, because of space limitations is unfeasible. However, the argument in this would be much the same as the conclusion to this paper. Also, if the argument of this paper is upheld that the principle and the major theoretical obstacle to revealed religion regarding the miraculous will be overcome (Flew: 1997: 46).

Hume's argument in 'Of Miracles' is an ambiguous one and that two different readings appear feasible (Geisler, 1997: 75). The author will refer to these as the *a priori* and *a posteriori* arguments. However, prior to exploring these arguments in any detail the author will delineate Hume's conception of the miraculous.³

¹ Elsewhere in his dialogues Hume writes that in the realm of religion "A total suspense of judgement is here our only reasonable resource" Humes, *Dialogues concerning natural Religion* cited in Charlesworth, 2002: 99).

² These arguments are given in part two of Hume's work. The overall argument is that no historical miracle-claim is believable because a) people love to sensationalise and gossip about extraordinary events, b) some religious people are prepared to deceive to advance their truth-claims, c) these miracles often appear to occur in "ignorant and barbarous nations" and finally d) miracles occur within the context of different miracles and are inter-mutally discredited by members of these religions. In this paper the author will refer the the *a posteriori* argument, however, in this paper the reader should understand that this refers to what will be shown as a alternate reading of Hume's first argument and not one of the *a posteriori* delineated here.

³ There are, in the author's opinion, serious inadequacies in Hume's concept of Miracle. However, to establish the level of the argument's self-referential cogency Hume's concept of the miraculous will be granted.

The fullest explication Hume, (115 n.1) gives on what constitutes a miracle is “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent”. Immediately prior to this statement Hume, (115) noted that nothing “is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happen in the common course of nature”. Foundational to Hume’s definition is a) the belief that there are laws of Nature, b) the conviction that these laws of nature are immutable⁴ and, c) that the truth or falsity of the God-hypothesis is immaterial to the continued operation of these laws.⁵

The *a priori* Argument.

The *a priori* argument against the very possibility of the miraculous can be formularised as follows:

1. A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature (Hume, 114).
2. These laws have been established on the basis of “firm and unalterable experience” (Hume, 114)
- Therefore,
3. Miracle cannot occur.⁶

It is clear that for many such a syllogism has proved convincing; for instance, John Hick, (1973: 46) can declare that “if a miracle is defined as a breach of natural law, one can declare *a priori* that there are no miracles”. To this argument in its humean formulation, however, the author would like to posit an objection.

Hume’s argument seems to beg the question. The crucial point of discussion must concern premiss 2. Since a law of nature is defined as unalterable experience and a miracle is a violation of these laws, then a miracle is a violation of what cannot be altered (Geisler, 1997: 75). Hence, were it the case that the sun not rising tomorrow were in fact a special act of God, this could still not be a miracle. Instead of the proposition $X = Y$ (where X is the regular occurrence of the sun rising in the morning and Y is the law of nature) one could

⁴ Hume, (114 emphasis added) notes that “a firm *and unalterable* experience has established these laws”. It remains the case that one’s understanding of what these Laws actually are is mutable as the contingencies of scientific knowledge continue to advance.

⁵ Hume has not offered any proof that these Laws of Nature will in the future continue to determine the conditions of life. Logically the proposition ‘the sun has risen every morning for the last X millenia’ does not definitively prove that ‘the sun will rise tomorrow morning’. This is a logical conclusion from the first two propositions (if A and B then C).

⁶ Hume, (115) seems to argue this way when he writes:

There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation [premiss 1 and 2]. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, *here is a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any [a priori] miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed* (Emphasis added).

justifiably posit $Y = X + 1(\text{day})$ because Y corresponds to regular experience.⁷ In short, since the very notion of an actual miracle, within the strict confines of the syllogism, is both physically and logically impossible any event that would seem to be such an event necessitates a readjustment to Y for the argument to remain valid.

Given that Hume has defined a miracle as a violation of natural law and secondly declared that everything that occurs in this world is determined and explained by these natural laws then the way Hume begs the question is made clear. Hume assumes the truth of metaphysical naturalism. Given that Hume's argument is an attempt to argue for the non-occurrence of a miracle the prior assumption that everything must be explainable by purely natural means with no space for supernatural agency is unreasonable. Of course, metaphysical naturalism may be true, however, for Hume's argument to avoid begging the question he must at least grant that it might not be (Nash, 1997: 119-123; Reppert, 1998: paragraphs 10 -15).⁸

The *a priori* Argument and Theistic Rationality.

Were it the case that the *a priori* argument were true then Hume would have reached a proof not only for the non-existence of the miraculous but also the non-existence of a deity that intervenes in human affairs vis-à-vis the falsity of orthodox Christianity. If laws of nature were absolute and immutable in the fashion Hume argued then claims of Jesus being born of a virgin, living on the earth as the hypostatic union of deity and humanity and rising from the dead never again to die are *a priori* erroneous. Reason would dictate as absurd anyone who would countenance such beliefs.

The *a posteriori* Argument

A far more significant humean argument against epistemology of theistic belief Hume's *a posteriori* argument. A distinction should here be made between the possibility of the occurrence of a miracle and the reasonableness of an agent's belief in the occurrence of this same alleged miracle (Davis, 1993: 3; Flew, 1997: 49). Hume's *a posteriori* argument is an attempt to argue that there have never been the circumstances present, and there it is unlikely that the necessary epistemic environment will ever be actualised to make belief in a

⁷ Of course Y in this context is not synonymous with a law of nature but rather humanity's understanding what are the laws of nature. It would be the case that the agents would understand $X + 1$ better corresponds to Y than X did.

⁸ Metaphysical naturalism is defined as the *a priori* exclusion of any supernatural entity whereas methodological naturalism is taken to refer to the reasonable presumption against a supernatural incursion into the natural.

particular miracle reasonable. Given the question-begging present in the *a priori* argument, one may restate the first two premises as follows:

4. A miracle is by definition uncommon and not in accord with natural law.
5. Natural Law is the description of regular occurrences.

Premiss (4) solves the previous question-begging flaw in the *a priori* argument by admitting the theoretical possibility of the miraculous.⁹ Likewise, premiss (5) maintains that collective human experience is important for discovering the nature and content of natural laws. From these two premises, Hume attempts to outline the means by which a wise man should verify a purported miracle claim. Unlike the *a priori* approach Hume's approach here is an evidentialist one; indicative of this is Hume's, (110) claim that "[a] wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence". In particular, the evidence Hume speaks of relates firstly to the wise man's perception of past regularities (namely perceived laws of nature) and that of independent human testimonies. Hence Hume continues to argue that

6. The evidence of the regular is always greater than that for the rare
7. A wise man should base his belief on that which possesses the greater evidence
- Therefore,
8. A wise man should never believe in the occurrence of a miracle-claim.

Hume's argument then, is as follows:

4. A miracle is by definition uncommon and not in accord with natural law.
5. Natural Law is the description of regular occurrences.
6. The evidence of the regular is always greater than that for the rare
7. A wise man should base his belief on that which possesses the greater evidence
- Therefore,
8. A wise man should never believe in the occurrence of a miracle-claim.

Hume's thought can be seen in the the following example regarding an alleged event C. Suppose agent A is someone who agent B implicitly trusts. A, seemingly not displaying evidence of suffering from any mind-altering substances or abnormal state of mind, testifies to B that the previous day, in clear daylight, although with no-one in sight, he spontaneously levitated two metres off the ground and remained suspended, fully conscious, for ten minutes.¹⁰ What should B, as a humean theorist, consider regarding event C?

According to Hume, (111) B is constrained to evaluate this alleged miracle event probabilistically. In terms of the probability of C having actually occurred B may theorize as follows

⁹ If the possibility of the miraculous is granted and a miracle is defined of a natural law then natural law cannot be "unalterable" but rather a regular pattern of nature's repetitivity.

¹⁰ Whilst the example is the author's own the main contours of this argument have been taken from Davis, (1993: 5-6).

9. All my previous experience regarding the past behaviour of humanity's capacity to levitate is contrary to A's claim to have experienced event C.

10. Probability seems to dictate that it is more likely that A is in error as to what physically happened regarding event C than (9) is false.¹¹

Therefore,

11. I am epistemically justified in doubting the occurrence of C.

(9) is based on what appears the perfectly reasonable epistemological principle that B's believe in the reasonableness of C should be based on what B knows *has* in the past happened. And, since B is aware of no previous verified happenings of C then, while not *a priori* ruling out that C did occur, B is justified in having strong doubts that C did in fact occur (Davis, 1993: 5). On the balance of probability while it is true that A is generally trustworthy B is reasonable in assuming that in this instance A is mistaken (premiss 11).

Geisler's Objection.

Geisler, (1997: 79) has objected to Hume's argument in the following way. Geisler has posited that Hume's methodology makes impossible a believe that any unusual event has occurred. Geisler offers the example of the perfect bridge hand in which the odds against such an event occurring are 1, 635, 013, 559, 600 to 1.¹² Geisler argues that Hume confuses the quantity of evidence with the quality. Hence, in the event of an agent actually holding the perfect bridge hand Hume still could not believe the agent to hold this hand. To formalise this argument in the same form as that shown above A₁ claims that she has in her possession the perfect bridge hand (C₁). Should B₁ believe her? The author would argue that, as before, B is justified in having doubts. Consider the difference between the two propositions offered previously:

- i) Out of 1, 635, 013, 559, 600 possible permutations if I were dealt a hand it would be the best one possible.
- ii) If I were dealt 1, 635, 013, 559, 600 bridge hands I would have one that was perfect.

¹¹ That there were no independent corroborating witnesses to C would seem, from B's perspective, add credence to this proposition. Hume, (116) employs a device analogous to the idea of Occam's Razor. Hume writes:

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 one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle.

¹² Geisler's argument is not a perfect analogy. From a human's perspective at least the world is not a closed system whereas the number of potential bridge hands is. Hence there is a huge difference between the two following propositions:

- i) Out of 1, 635, 013, 559, 600 possible permutations if I were dealt a hand it would be the best one possible.
- ii) If I were dealt 1, 635, 013, 559, 600 bridge hands I would have one that was perfect.

Within this closed system in any one instance the probability of (i) is unlikely but in (ii) the balance of probability is in its favour.

Geisler's argument is that Hume, on the basis of his argument, is forced to deny proposition (ii). This is untrue. On the balance of probability B_1 should weigh the instances in favour of C_1 (namely 1) against those against the instantiation of C_1 (namely 1, 635, 013, 559, 599). On this basis it is unlikely that C_1 has occurred. Therefore, one can posit the following premiss:

9(1) All my previous experience regarding bridge indicates that, while possible, that the balance of probability is heavily in favour of C_1 not being the case.

Crucially however, A_1 stating she has a perfect bridge hand is advantageous to her, whether she has it or not for my believing she has a perfect hand will harm my game. For my belief that A_1 may have C_1 when, in fact she does not, strengthens her position in the game.

Consequently premiss 10(1) also follows

10(1) On 1, 635, 013, 559, 599 possibilities it would be advantageous to deceive me as to her having the perfect hand while only once would it not.

Consequently, 9(1) and 10(1) still make 11(1) reasonable.

11(1) I am epistemically justified in doubting the occurrence of C_1 .

B_1 is epistemically justified in disbelieving the instantiation of C_1 (11(1)). To return to the subject of the miraculous, the epistemological principle that one should proportion believe in a miracle event to the evidence with a strong predisposition to preferentially regard past experience as superior appears to be a sound argument.¹³

The Designatory Objection.

Martin, (1990: 196) writes:

The believer in miracles must give reasons to suppose that the event E, the alleged miracle will probably not be explained by any unknown scientific laws that govern nature. Since presumably not all laws that do govern nature have been discovered, this seems difficult to do.

Martin's objection is that the theist has no solid ground for asserting that E is a miracle rather than an example of an undiscovered law of nature. Consider the previous example of A levitating two metres off the ground for a ten minute period. Even if it were granted that

¹³ It is true that according to humean logic there is a powerful bias against accepting that powerful events have occurred. However, the author would argue that this is perfectly reasonable given that theoretically all beliefs are proportioned to evidence. It is conceivable that were it discovered that an untampered CCTV camera was in operation viewing event C that B may be justified in then believing it. Epistemic justification is then contextual. For instance, it is difficult to see how an agent D in 1066 could have been epistemically justified in believing that in 1649 Charles I, the King of England, would be executed by his own countrymen. However, were this same person present in early 1649 then such a proposition seems reasonable.

probability favoured the conclusion that C did occur; how could this be shown to be a miracle, given that a miracle is “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent” and not merely an event in concurrence with an undiscovered law of nature? (See also Flew, 1966: 150-152). To answer this charge the E’s apologist would not only have to somehow show that E was a violation of all laws of nature (as they are rather than merely what they are believed to be) but also to presume to show that E’s causation lie with a hypothetical deity. Given that this apologist is not omniscient and therefore not in cognizance of all the laws of nature then this seems an impossible task.

The Wise Man’s Religious Epistemology in the *a posteriori* Argument.

Based on the *a posteriori* argument, the following conclusions are warranted regarding the epistemic status of religious belief in Hume’s “Of Miracles”. First, the Wise Man, while not *a priori* excluding the possibility of the miraculous, is justified in having a presumption against belief in the particular occurrence of a miracle given the preference given to the repeatability of natural laws in history. Only when the balance of probability is so great to overcome this presumption should the wise man be justified in not strongly doubting the historicity of a particular miracle. Second, the designatory objection further compounds the problem of the necessary preconditions to make the wise man’s belief in the historicity of a particular miracle epistemically justifiable. While in many ways acting as an Ideal Spectator the wise man is not omniscient vis-à-vis is not in full comprehension of all the laws of nature that are in operation (as opposed to humanity’s understanding of what these laws are). It seems highly improbable that the wise man could show that a miracle rather than an unexplained event has occurred.

So far, however, the Hume’s argument has been shown to be one of context-independent epistemological enquiry. Hume’s essay did have an agenda and this was principally to argue “that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion” (127). This is far from insignificant for as Flew, (1997:46) notes if this is granted then this threatens to abort “the whole project of a rational apologetic for a revealed religion”.¹⁴ Since Hume, (116) emphatically states that “there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle” it is clear

¹⁴ Flew note that eighteenth century Christianity placed great faith in apologetic strategies and in particular in arguments from the miraculous and allegedly fulfilled prophecies. Therefore, to deny that this is possible means Hume offered a significant challenge to the epistemic justification of Christianity’s adherents then and now.

that this is not merely a theoretical methodological treatise but an implicit rejection of the truth of for instance the literal resurrection of Jesus. Hume then is making a statement on the actual absurdity of the Christian faith arguing that to believe it, is itself miraculous (131).

Part 2: The Wise Man and Religious Experience. (proper basicity)

In the forgoing discussion it was argued that Hume's *a posteriori* argument is cogent, and that the wise man is justified in being predisposed to scepticism with regard to any particular occurrence of a miracle. However, it is the author's intention to argue that in regard to the issue of religious epistemology Hume's conclusion that the theist should resort to fideistic strategies is not a valid one, in short, theistic conviction can still be self-referentially reasonable.¹⁵

Reciprocating the Wise Man's Role.

The role of the wise man throughout Hume's essay is that of outside observer. Hence to retrieve the argument of A's spontaneous levitation suppose in this case that the wise man (agent B) changes roles with A. In this case by the logic detailed earlier it is now A who is justified in disbelieving the historicity of C. However, the wise man (namely B) appears to be an altered epistemic status. B is not now external to the fact of C but an active participant in it. Is it reasonable for B to be epistemically justified in believing that C did occur, namely that the wise man was not deceived in all his sensory perception and that he did, in fact, levitate two metres above the ground for ten minutes.

In this circumstance it is premiss (10) that is altered. It is true that the wise man has the same experience as he did in premiss (9) and that he has a disposition to expect on the basis of past experience that humanity does not have an inherent ability to levitate. However, B is also in intimate cognizance of any potential weaknesses in his noetic structure. He strongly believes (a) through his failure to remember any instance of contamination and (b) the regularity of all his other experiences around the same time frame that he was not mentally deceived and not experiencing hallucinatory thoughts. Also, he strongly believes that he is not deceiving anyone. In sum the wise man (B) is epistemically justified in trusting the veracity of his own testimony than is the external evaluator (A). It is this circumstance that Hume and it is the argument here that if he had then Hume may have admitted that B (the wise man) is

¹⁵ The reason why this reasonableness is self-referential will be explicated subsequently.

epistemically justified in his purported experience/witness of a miracle although A (the external observer) is not.

Root's Objection.

Root, (1989: 338-339) has offered an extension of Hume's argument to suggest that even on personal experience one is unjustified in believing in the historicity of a miracle-event.

Subsequently, Root, (1989: 339, 341) writes that

Unless I believe that nature is uniform I have no basis on which to find any causal judgement plausible or implausible at all ... If we believe that nature is uniform, then we have a reason to believe that testimony is a reason for belief, but if we believe that nature is not uniform, we don't.

Root's argument seems to be that if B (the wise man) believes that he has experienced a miracle that is by definition a violation of natural law then none of B's beliefs based on personal experience is well founded because there is always a doubt regarding causality. Consequently, B cannot if he believes in the historicity of C, reasonably believe that the sun will rise tomorrow (the uniformity of natural law). Conversely, if B holds that natural laws are uniform then he must disbelieve C. The similarity between this argument and Hume's *a priori* argument should be clear and the objections the author applied to that also apply here.

However, more may be said of Root's objection. Root's objection conflates the claim that the future will resemble the past in some respect which, based on past experience is a reasonable supposition, with the claim that nature is uniform and hence a closed deterministic system (Reppert, 1998: paragraph 28). It may be helpful here to cite Swinburne, (2003: 25) because while Swinburne is discussing Hume and not Root his comments are relevant.

Hume's worst mistake was to suppose that the only relevant background theory to be established from wider evidence was a scientific theory about what are the laws of nature. But any theory showing whether laws of nature are ultimate or whether they depend on something higher for their operation is crucially relevant. If there is no God, then the laws of nature are the ultimate determinants of what happens. But if there is a God, then whether and for how long and under what circumstances laws of nature operate depends on God.

This is a very important comment. Root's contention that to believe in the uniformity of nature *a priori* destroys the possibility of the miraculous indicates that he is already committed to an atheistic system before the argument begins. It is not apparent why the existence of a (sometimes) interventionist God necessitates that the past is not a reasonable guide to what will happen in the future. However, it is unreasonable that the uniformity of nature in the sense that nature must necessarily be a closed and deterministic causal nexus

must *a priori* assumed (Davis. 1993: 7). It is for this reason that Hume's *a posteriori* argument is vastly superior to the *a priori one* because it theoretically posits the possibility C's occurrence.

The Designatory Problem Again.

It has been argued that Root's argument, like Hume's *a priori* argument, fails in its question-begging tendencies and that given B's (the wise man's) experience of C the balance of probability (for him) *may* weigh in the historicity of C's favour. However, once again we may cite Flew's objection. Even if it were granted that B is epistemically warranted in affirming the historicity of C, how could B know that C was a miracle and not merely an extraordinary event? Again, based on the premise that humanity is not in full cognizance of all existing natural laws then B is unjustified in asserting absolute epistemic certitude of C as a miraculous event. The author would argue that this is not a fatal flaw, however.

In order to argue that this is possible the author will adopt the argument from proper basicity offered by the thought of Reformed Epistemology evidenced in the thought of Platinga, (2000).¹⁶ Platinga's view is based on a critique of classical foundationalism. Foundationalism is the base from which the grounds of epistemology are grounded, these grounds are labelled properly basic beliefs. A properly basic belief is one that is not warranted or inferred from any other believe but is warranted nonetheless (Pargetter, 1992: 151; Swinburne, 2001: 133-135). The three types of properly basic beliefs are

- i) beliefs that are self evident, that is, beliefs that are necessarily the case (for example, $2 + 2 = 4$).
- ii) Incorrigible beliefs (for example, "I feel pain").
- iii) beliefs that are evident to the senses (for example, "I am typing this on a keyboard" (Platinga, 2000: 82-85).

Platinga argues that these three foundations are not adequate; Platinga inserts an explicitly theological supposition that is, that the idea of the *sensus divinitas* is likewise properly basic.¹⁷ As soon as the proposition 'God Exists' is not the end point of an argument (as it is, for example, in the cosmological argument) but its foundation then Hume's methodology

¹⁶ It is important to note that the author is not here arguing that the miracle-event constitutes a properly basic belief (although, in the right context it might). Instead, I argue that the same phenomenology can be applied to this question.

¹⁷ Platinga adds to this the belief that if God exists s/he is like to make him/herself known and the idea of the *sensus divinitas* is on this basis a feasible supposition.

seems to be undercut.¹⁸ Hume's argument in the *a posteriori* version is what Platinga, (2000: xiii) labels as a *de jure* objection to theistic belief. Hume stated that even if granted that C did occur B would not be justified in believing in it.¹⁹ The name Platinga uses for this epistemic justification is 'warrant'. Platinga argues that a person is warranted in holding a belief to be true iff it operates in a properly functioning cognitive environment. Platinga's rationality operates within an internalist paradigm (see Swinburne, (2001: 152-164). Platinga argues that an experience can provide a *prima facie* belief in God. To return to the example of B's levitation, we have shown that B would be justified in believing in the actuality of C although not necessarily justified in the belief that this was a miracle. However, what if while B was levitating he somehow felt this was God's doing. It is the author's argument that B is justified in viewing C not only as an extraordinary event but also as a miracle given the collocation of C with this noninferential perception.²⁰ It is important to note that this position entails the following.

First, Platinga's approach does not entail fideism and therefore Hume's conclusion to his essay is false. It does not follow that belief in God is rational given that it is internally coherent.²¹ However, Platinga, (2000: 357-366) is adamant that the belief 'God Exists' while *prima facie* rational may be proved to be false, hence arguments from evil and other theistic objections, if successful, prove that Platinga is not justified in his belief in God. Likewise, if someone proved that C was not a miracle then B is not justified in believing that C was.

Second, this previous point indicates that since B does not know all natural laws and neither does A then, for the time being, both A and B hold equally rational views although one is

¹⁸ It should be noted that as Wood, (1998: 164) details Reformed Epistemologists do not necessarily reject the validity of the theistic proofs. Platinga for instance has maintained his support for a variant form of the ontological argument. However, they do note that theistic belief initiated on nonpropositional grounds (for example, 'I was in the countryside and had a sense that there must be a God).

¹⁹ This is based on the idea that not all true belief is knowledge.

²⁰ While Platinga, (2000: 269 n. 51) does note that a miracle (as defined by Hume) can be the base of knowledge of God this is not the norm according to his theory although a special act of God is. It may be noted that, while Hume's conclusion was clearly a prudential one given the different intellectual climate, there is a resonance here with Hume's, (131) conclusion that "whoever is moved by *Faith* to assent in it, is conscious of a miracle in his own person" given that belief in God is based on the *sensus divinitas*. Unlike Hume who argued that this is irrational Platinga's method merely posits that is rational according to a theistic as opposed to metaphysically natural framework.

²¹ John Hick (2001: 26, 28) complains that Platinga's attempt to provide epistemic justification is erroneous since it could entail the equally well-founded epistemological foundation of other faith traditions. However, iff Christianity is true then it is likely that a Christian is in a more secure epistemic state than those of other religions (Platinga, 2000: 54).

clearly right and the other wrong although until they are both cognizant of all natural laws their views remain incommensurable (Penelhum, 1997: 81).²² Third, while B is justified in believing in the occurrence of C as a miracle this is not an argument from religious experience. Rather, it is saying that B does not need an argument to believe that C was a miracle any more than he does to argue that $2 + 2 = 4$. C has no evidential value to an apologist other than evidence the rationality of her own belief (see Clark, 2000).

Conclusions

It has been the argument of this paper that based on the presumption that the wise man is not a witness to a miracle-event then he is justified in disbelieving its historicity, irrespective of whether it has occurred or not. However, if he is a witness to the event and does not have reason to doubt his senses then, if he deems the probability sufficient enough, he is justified in believing the occurrence of an extraordinary event and *may* be justified in believing this to be a miracle. Consequently Hume's argument that it is irrational to profess a Christian faith on the basis of his argument is erroneous. A person may be epistemically justified in believing a system of religion to be true provided s/he grants that it could be defeated and it is internally coherent.

²² Therefore, while both B and A are epistemically justified in their respective beliefs that C did/did not actually occur the truthfulness of the claim should be viewed proleptically. Within a Christian view it is possible to see this as an eschatological verificationist principle (see Schults, 1999: 213 and Pannenberg, 1988: 23-25).

Bibliography.

- Charlesworth, Max. *Philosophy and Religion: From Plato to Postmodernism*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2002.
- Clark, Kelly James. The Reformed Epistemological Method, in ed. Steven B Cowan, *Five Views on Apologetics*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000. pp. 265 – 284.
- Davis, Stephen T. *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection*, London: SPCK, 1993.
- Flew, Anthony. *God and Philosophy*, New York: Delta, 1966.
- Flew, Anthony. Neo-Humean Arguments about the Miraculous, in ed. R Douglas Geivett and Gary R Habermas, *In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, Leicester: Apollos, 1997. pp 45-57.
- Gaskin, J C A. *Hume's Philosophy of Religion*, London: Macmillan, 1988.
- Geisler, Norman L. Miracles and the Modern Mind, in ed. R Douglas Geivett and Gary R Habermas, *In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, Leicester: Apollos, 1997. pp 73-85.
- Hick, John. *Philosophy of Religion*, 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N J: Prentice-Hall, 1973. (subtitle?)
- Hick, John. The Epistemological Challenge of Religious Pluralism, in ed. John Hick, *Dialogues in the Philosophy of Religion*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001. pp 25-36.
- Hume, David. *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals: Reprinted from the 1777 Edition with Introduction and Analytical Index by L.A.Selby-Bigge*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1975.
- Martin, Michael. *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990.
- Murphy, Nancey. *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, London: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Nash, Ronald H. Miracles and Conceptual Systems, in ed. R Douglas Geivett and Gary R Habermas, *In Defence of Miracles: A Comprehensive Case for God's Action in History*, Leicester: Apollos, 1997. pp 115-131.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Systematic Theology*, volume one, Grand rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1988.
- Pargetter, Robert. Experience, Proper Basicity, and Belief in God, in ed. R Douglas Geivett and Brendan Sweetman, *Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992. pp ** - **.

- Penulhum, Terence. Revelation and Philosophy, in ed. Paul Avis, *Divine Revelation*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997. pp 67-86.
- Platinga, Alvin. *Warranted Christian Belief*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Reppert, Victor. Hume on Miracles, Frequencies, and Prior Probabilities, (1998), accessed from the World Wide Web on 13 September 2003 at http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/victor_reppert/miracles.html.
- Root, Michael. Miracles and the Uniformity of Nature, in *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 26, (1989), pp **-**.
- Schults, F Leron. *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology, Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality*, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999.
- Swinburne, Richard. *Epistemic Justification*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Swinburne, Richard. *The Resurrection of God Incarnate*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Wood, W Jay. *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, Leicester: IVP, 1998.

