

Hume's comments on miracles



Hume's essay "On Miracle" states that a wise man should base his beliefs on the evidence of infallible past experience upon which he expects events to certainly turn out. The past experience should act as full evidence to the recurrence of a similar event in the future. In other cases the wise man needs to practice much caution by weighing the opposite experiments as well. The evidence will then be supported by the greatest number of observations made in the opposition experiments. Through the weighing of evidence in the two opposing experiments, the degree of assurance will result from the experiment whose evidence outweighs that of the other.

The principle of experience also contributes to the degree of assurance through the testimony of witnesses against the fact they undertake to establish. Mutual destruction of any existing authority and belief before hand is a necessity if probability against the testimony of witnesses is to be increased on the fact they affirm. The testimony should not just be taken as miraculous or marvelous but a subject of evidence whose strongest proof must prevail.

Hume defines miracles as: "a violation of the laws of nature that are firmly established on the unalterable experience" (2). Some of the common phenomenon such as the fire consuming the wood, the inability of the lead to remain suspended in the air, a healthy man succumbing to death and water putting out fire all form part of the laws of nature. Anything that goes against these laws of nature qualifies to be a miracle. For instance, if a dead man comes back to life this event amounts to a miracle because it has never occurred in any country or age.

There should be a uniform experience against every miraculous event which in turn serves as a full proof of evidence. The nature of facts and proof evidence against the miracle can render it credible or incredible. The infallibility of the testimony is correlated to the degree of proof against a miracle. If the possibility of the testimony being a falsehood is more miraculous than the fact it is advanced to ascertain, then there is a degree of assurance concerning the miracle.

Miracles such as the one wrought upon the tomb of Abbe Paris (Jansenit) in France whereby all manner of sicknesses were healed by the holy sepulcher are unquestionable due to the credibility of high caliber and cloud of witnesses some of whom a civil magistrates and the critics opposed to the idea of miracles. This renders the miracle a historic undisputable phenomenon. This degree of evidences in witnesses could not be attained in the cooked story about the England's Queen Elizabeth's death and resurrection on January 1, 1600 that was only witnessed by a handful of her personal physicians and court. The witnesses did not reach the required threshold of the degree of evidence hence remains a deception.

Our religion which is based on faith rather than reason should not compromise our judgment and evidence for the miracle. Barbarous and ignorant people whose origins are full of fabulous accounts of miracles which cannot be corroborated with fact and testimony must be guarded against if at all measures of probability on the miracles has to be established.