

evaluate hume's essay sample



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Evaluate Hume's claim that miracles are the least likely of events. (35 marks) Hume defined miracles to be a "violation of the laws of nature" According to Hume, no matter how strong the evidence for a specific miracle may be, it will always be more rational to reject the miracle than to believe in it. The definition of Hume is both logical and objective as it esquires empirical evidence, e. g. Ockham's razor, the simplest explanation is the correct one and therefore miracles do not occur. Hume was a septic and also thought reason through empiricism induction. However, some may say that this definition of miracles is too narrow. Hume takes two arguments against miracles, theoretical and practical. His theoretical case against miracles is that they are theoretically possible or probable for miracles to exist. This is split in to two arguments the Argument from probability and Induction. A miracle would be based on induction which would come from cause and effect suggesting that the laws of nature are no violated.

The more an event happens in a particular way the less likely it is that the opposite will happen, for example the sun will rise so it will always rise. therefore it is more rational to believe that miracles do not happen. This is supported by Flew with the testimony from history, that there is a lack of direct and empirical evidence for the number of people to have seen a miracle. However, Swinburne suggests that just because it is not a regular occurrence it does not mean that they did not happen once in history. This therefore highlighted that Hume's claim that miracles are least likely of events is probably true. Hume arguments from testimony suggest that the only evidence we have of miracles occurring is from testimonies from other people. He says that the likelihood of a miracle occurring compared to that

of the witnesses being mistaken. As Hume is a sceptic he argues that the most rational belief in anything must have evidence to back it up.

Whereas Swinburne argues the Principle of testimony, we should start with the premise that we should accept what appears to be the case or the testimony of others unless we have evidence that undermines it. This strengthens the claim from Hume that miracles are least likely events.

Hume's practical arguments against miracles are the quality of the witness, he suggests that people in the 1st century were not as educated or established as the time that Hume lived, and therefore he classed those as being "ignorant and barbarous people". However the counter argument to this would be an ad hominem argument whereby he attacks the veracity of the witness rather than what they say. Another argument is that strengthens the first argument that there is not sufficient number of witnesses who are educated or enlightened, however the greatest miracle the resurrection, it is said that over 3,000 people were said to have witnessed that and therefore provides evidence.

Another practical argument is psychological which is where people tend to like to believe in different or extraordinary events which can be exploited by religious people to be made believable for example, people believe they have seen space ships. However recently and since Jesus was born there has been no more than 69 confirmed miracles, this is due to the strict rules and criteria to qualify a miracle as a miracle. This therefore strengthens Hume's Claim that Miracles are the least likely of events. Overall, Hume's claim that miracles are the least likely of events is strengthened by his practical and theoretical arguments for miracles. His main points are that when the bible

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was written and most Miracles were reported the quality of the witnesses was very poor with " ignorant and barbarous people". However Swinburne's argument says we have to believe the witness unless we have reason to disbelieve them then they must be telling the truth.