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Machen, J. Gresham. J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) was born in Baltimore and was graduated with a degree in classics from Johns Hopkins University. He studied at Princeton Theological Seminary under B. B. Warfield and R. D. Wilson. He also studied at Princeton University and as a fellow in Germany at Marburg and Göttingen. At Marburg he studied under Adolf Jülicher and Wilhelm Herrmann, who was a disciple of Albrecht Ritschl. At Göttingen he studied under E. Schürer and W. Bousset. In 1906 Machen became an instructor in New Testament at Princeton Seminary.

In 1912 Machen gave an address, “Christianity and Culture,” which was to set a theme for his career. He identified the problem in the Christian church as the relation between knowledge and piety. There were three approaches to this relationship, he said. Liberal Protestants subordinated the gospel to science and disregarded the supernatural. Fundamentalists preserved the supernatural but rejected science. Machen’s solution was to blend the pursuit of knowledge with religion.

By 1914 Machen was a full professor of New Testament at Princeton. After World War I, the Northern Presbyterian Church and Princeton Seminary both underwent a fundamental shift in theology, from historical Christianity and traditional Calvinism to a liberal or modernist following of German theological trends. In the ensuing battle, the denomination and seminary split. By 1929, Machen, Oswald T. Allis, Cornelius Van Til, and Robert Dick Wilson, along with twenty students, left the seminary. Under Machen, these men established Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.

In 1933, to counter the increasing liberalism in the Presbyterian Church, USA, Machen founded the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions. This board tested and commissioned orthodox missionaries and gave conservative churches an alternative to supporting liberals sent out by their own denomination. The General Assembly demanded that Machen leave the board. He refused and was tried for violating his ordination vows. Without being given the opportunity to defend his actions he was suspended from the ministry by New Brunswick Presbytery in Trenton, New Jersey. He, along with others, was expelled from the PCUSA in 1936. Immediately a new organization was formed, the Presbyterian Church of America. Only a few months later Machen died suddenly while on a preaching tour to build support for the new denomination. Without his focused leadership, the infant church was divided

by the individual agendas of its leaders. Two denominations eventually emerged, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Bible Presbyterian Church.

While he rejected the label of “fundamentalist” and some of the theological emphases traditionally adopted by the fundamentalist movement, Machen was the intellectual leader of that movement during the 1920s. His scholarship and professional work were respected even by his opponents. One of his most helpful contributions for generations of students was his *New Testament Greek for Beginners* (1924). Of theological importance was his classic defense, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (1930). This collection of lectures given at Columbia Theological Seminary argued that the virgin birth was not a late addition to Christianity. Other significant defenses of intellectually-strong faith were *The Origin of Paul’s Religion* (1921), *Christianity and Liberalism* (1923), *What Is Faith?* (1927), *The Christian Faith in the Modern World* (1938), and *The Christian View of Man* (1937).

Fervent, Thoughtful Apologetic. Machen’s apologetic is closely aligned with the work of Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, A. A. Hodge, Caspar Wistar Hodge, and Geerhardus Vos. As the work of these men, Machen’s philosophy was rooted in Thomas Reid and Scottish Realism. He believed that reason, which relied upon and dealt with facts, was essential for faith. He followed the classic pattern of *notitia* (cognitive knowledge), *assensus* (feeling), that leads to *fiducia* (faith). Machen pointed out that reason does not *prove* faith. This, he believed, was the fundamental error of liberalism (Lewis and Demarest, 374). Machen was ever cautious to put Christian experience in its proper context: “Christian experience is rightly used when it confirms the documentary evidence. . . . Christian experience is rightly used when it helps to convince us that the events narrated in the New Testament actually did occur, but it can never enable us to be Christians, whether the events occurred or not” (*Christianity and Liberalism*, 72).

Machen’s starting point for apologetics was human consciousness, which relied upon logical analysis, deduction, and common sense. He did not elaborate on theistic proofs; nonetheless, he relied upon traditional arguments. Machen went so far as to delay his ordination until he could satisfactorily answer Kant’s objections. He affirmed:

The very basis of the religion of Jesus was a triumphant belief in the real existence of a personal God. And without that belief no type of religion can rightly appeal to Jesus today. Jesus was a theist, and a rational theism is at the basis of Christianity. Jesus did not, indeed, support His theism by argument; He did not provide in advance answers to the Kantian attack upon the theistic proofs. But that means not that He was indifferent to the belief which is the logical result of those proofs, but that the belief stood so firm, both to Him and to His hearers, that in His teaching it is always presupposed. So today it is not necessary for all Christians to analyze the logical basis of their belief in God; the human mind has a wonderful faculty for the condensation of perfectly valid arguments, and what seems like an instinctive belief may turn out to be the result of many logical steps. Or, rather, it may be that the belief in a personal God is the result of a primitive revelation, and that the theistic proofs are only the logical confirmation of what was originally arrived at by a different means. At any rate, the logical confirmation of the belief in God is a vital concern to the Christian. [ibid., 59–60]

Infallible and Inerrant. Following the old Princetonian tradition, Machen believed the Bible in its original writings (autographs) to be plenary inspired, in that God's Word was mediated through the lives and personalities of the writers and the genre of literature through which they wrote. Thus historical narrative is not judged with the same standards as poetry. Scripture is infallibly God's truth and is without error, but it is not mechanically dictated (*see* BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR). "In all its parts," said Machen, Scripture is "the very word of God, completely true in what it says regarding matters of fact and completely authoritative in its commands" (*Christian Faith in the Modern World* , 2, 37). He affirmed: "Only the autographs of the Biblical books, in other words—the books as they came from the pen of the sacred writers, and not any of the copies of those autographs which we now possess—were produced with that supernatural impulsion and guidance of the Holy Spirit which we call inspiration" (*ibid.*, 39).

Defense of Christianity. Machen's apologetic for orthodoxy was mostly evidential. It began with an appeal to mostly biblical and historical facts that require an adequate explanation. Machen's defense of orthodoxy centered on two important miracles, the virgin birth and the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Machen often appealed, similar to Paul, to the fact that, if Christ was not born of a virgin in history and resurrected bodily three days after his death, our faith is in vain.

Machen defended miraculous acts in Scripture (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST), especially those of Christ, by defining a supernatural event as what "takes place by the immediate, as distinguished from the mediate, power of God" (*Christianity and Liberalism* , 99). This, he points out, presupposes the existence of a personal God and the existence of a real order of nature. Thus, miracles are supernaturally dependently joined to theism.

In defense of New Testament miracles (*see* MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE). Machen pointed out the mistake of isolating miracles from the rest of the New Testament. It is a mistake to discuss the resurrection of Jesus as though that which had to be proved was simply the resurrection of a first-century man in Palestine (*ibid.*, 104). Rather, the resurrection is supported by the historical uniqueness of Christ in his person and claims, and the "adequate occasion" or purpose for the miracle that can be detected (*ibid.*, 1, 104). The faith demonstrated by the early church was the most convincing argument for the resurrection (*What Is Christianity?* 6, 99). Machen further supports biblical miracles by pointing out the illegitimate naturalistic tendencies of the liberal church in rejecting them.

Evaluation. Machen defended orthodox Protestant faith at a crucial point in the first half of the twentieth century. He set a high standard of scholarship at a time when few others, liberal or conservative, were producing valuable academic studies. Many of these works are still widely used.

Machen's overall apologetic is succinctly summarized by C. Allyn Russell: "It was Machen's thesis that Christianity and liberalism were essentially two distinct and mutually exclusive religions, not two varieties of the same faith." He argued that they used similar language but proceeded from altogether different roots. "In assaulting liberalism as a non-Christian religion, Machen declared that liberal attempts to reconcile Christianity with modern science had relinquished everything distinctive of Christianity" (Russell, 50).

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Maimonides. Moses, son of Maimon (1135–1204). latinized his name into Maimonides. He left his native Cordova, Spain, in the wake of the Muslim invasion and went to North Africa and eventually Egypt, where he died in Cairo. Though known for his legal doctrine, "Rabbi Moses," as the scholastics called him, became the most celebrated Jewish philosopher of the middle ages.

In his *Guide for the Perplexed* , he addressed the semi-intellectual Jewish thinkers who were in a state of mental confusion because they believed the principles of Greek philosophy contradicted their religious faith. It was for those who hesitated between conflicting claims of philosophy and religion. Maimonides believed one could have full knowledge of Greek philosophy without giving up the observance of the commandments. Unfortunately, the

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reconciliation was usually in favor of an allegorical interpretation at the expense of a literal understanding of Scripture.

In addition to his Jewish faith, especially stressing the oneness and ineffability of God, Maimonides was heavily influenced by Alfarabi , Aristotle , Averroes , Philo , Plato , and Plotinus . The result was his own unique synthesis of these philosophers, with preference to Plato over Aristotle and heavy influence from Plotinus. Maimonides influenced Thomas Aquinas and other scholastic philosophers, and also the modern rationalist Benedict Spinoza .

Philosophy. Following his Jewish training, Maimonides believed God was one. He also held that God's existence was demonstrable but that his essence was unknowable. He offered proofs for God's existence used by the later scholastics, such as God as First Cause, First Mover, and Necessary Being (three of Aquinas's five proofs for God). Unlike the Greeks, he believed God was the efficient, as well as the formal and final, cause of the world.

Greek philosophers argued for the eternity of the world, but Maimonides found these arguments inconclusive because they overlooked the omnipotence of God, who can freely create a universe of whatever duration he wishes. Aquinas followed this line of reasoning.

Following Plotinus, Maimonides held that all knowledge of God is negative. Anything positive refers only to God's actions, not to his nature, which is essentially unknowable.

The Bible reveals one positive divine name, *YHWH* . The "tetragrammaton" name means "absolute existence." God is a pure and necessary existence. All creatures are contingent. Their existence is only an "accident" added to their essence.

Evaluation. There are many positive contributions in Maimonides' views. From the perspective of classical theism and apologetics (see CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS), his stress on the nature of God, creation, and the proofs for God's existence are commendable.

Of concern to Christians is Maimonides' negative theology, which allows no positive analogies (see ANALOGY). Also, his tendency to allegorize away parts of Scripture not reconcilable with prevailing Platonic philosophy was unnecessary and unacceptable.

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Manichaeism. See DUALISM .

Martin, Michael. Michael Martin, a late-twentieth-century Bible critic, wrote *The Case against Christianity* to argue that Jesus is not a historical figure. He contends that the earliest layer of the four Gospels is not historical, that Paul was not interested in the historical Jesus, and that Jesus, whether he existed, did not rise from the dead.

Evaluation. A critique of Martin's views begins with what Martin himself accepts regarding the earliest Epistles of Paul (see NEW TESTAMENT, DATING OF ; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ; NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS). Martin accepts the authenticity of some early Epistles, including 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians. In these letters, Paul affirmed that Jesus died and was raised (1 Corinthians 15). He recorded that the apostles were in Jerusalem after Jesus died (Gal. 1:17) where he had visited them twice, once after his conversion (Gal. 1:18–19) and once fourteen years later (2:1–10). Paul also met Peter later in Antioch (Gal. 2:11 –). Paul was not only a contemporary of the apostles but on par with them (1 Cor. 9:1). Contrary to Martin, Paul knew James the "brother of our Lord" (1 Cor. 9:5 ; Gal. 1:18–19). This is the natural sense of these passages.

Further, Josephus called James the "brother of Jesus," not of a Jerusalem faction (Josephus 20.9.1). In fact, all four Gospels speak of Jesus' brothers in the context of his physical family (Matt. 12:46–47 ; Mark 3:31–32 ; Luke 8:19–20 ; John 7:5). There is no ancient evidence to the contrary.

Paul mentions other details of Jesus' life (2 Cor. 5:16 , 21). So, it is simply not true that there is no support for the historicity of Jesus. Even the earliest layer of material accepted by Martin reveals details, including some basic ones about the death and resurrection of Christ.

Late Dating of the Gospels. There also are good reasons to reject Martin's late dates, from 70 to 135, for the Gospels. Once this premise is proven false, his whole case against the historicity of Jesus crumbles. Even such radical theologians as John A. T. Robinson date the Gospels between A.D. 40 to 65 (see Robinson, 352).

Several arguments for a pre-70 A.D. date can be marshaled. Most scholars date Mark in the decade 60–70, or more precisely, 65–70. Martin wrongly asserts that Mark was not mentioned until the mid-second century. Papias refers to Mark during the first quarter of the second century. Martin also errs in claiming that Luke was unknown by Clement, Ignatius, or Polycarp. All three Synoptic Gospels are cited by them, including a resurrection text from Luke 24 . Martin asserts that Clement is not clear about whether disciples received instructions from Jesus while on earth. Yet Clement wrote, "The apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ was sent forth from God" (1 Clement 42). Martin's case against the earlier dates for the Gospels collapses. And once the Gospels are placed within the generation of eyewitnesses and contemporaries of the events (as pre-70 dates do), then there is good evidence for the historicity of Jesus (see NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF).

Even the radical theologian John A. T. Robinson has come to believe a late date is untenable. He places the Gospels between 40 and 60. Roman historian Colin Hemer has shown that Luke

wrote Acts between 60 and 62. And Luke says there that his Gospel was already finished (see Acts 1:1 ; cf. Luke 1:1). Most critics believe Mark and/or Matthew were written before Luke. This would place all three within the time of contemporaries and eyewitnesses (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, DATING OF).

Use of Extrabiblical Sources. Martin's use of extrabiblical sources is seriously wanting. He wrongly rejects Josephus' reference to Jesus. He even incorrectly cites two authorities as being in favor of his view, F. F. Bruce and John Drane. Like most scholars, Bruce is skeptical of the rendering of one text from Josephus as though he believed in the resurrection of Christ. However, Bruce clearly accepts the general authenticity of Josephus' reference to Christ as a historical figure. Drane declared: "Most scholars have no doubts about the authenticity" of most of it. So, the very people Martin uses to debunk the Josephus citations hold that these citations do show that Jesus was a historical person in the early first century.

Criticism of the Resurrection. Martin believes that Gospel discrepancies discredit the resurrection. The problem of which women were at the tomb when is a case in point. Matthew says Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. Mark adds Salome to the two Marys. Luke adds Joanna to the two Marys. John refers only to Mary Magdalene.

The answer to this problem is not difficult to find. One would expect differences between independent accounts. Were there no differences in perspective, the accounts would be highly suspect. For a fuller discussion of the women at the resurrection, see RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, EVIDENCE FOR . The discrepancies are reconcilable (*see* BIBLE, ALLEGED ERRORS ; RESURRECTION, ORDER OF EVENTS). In the case of the women at the tomb, Mark and Luke indicate that other women were involved (Mark 15:40–41 ; Luke 23:55 ; 24:10). John quotes Mary as using the term "we" (20:2), showing that she was not alone, and that this was not an exhaustive report of visitors to the grave.

Martin also misapplies his analogy of evidence for Christ to that presented in a courtroom. Critics are more anxious to list inconsistencies than to give the text a fair reading. We have different standards of evidence than did the first-century witnesses. Compared with other ancient histories, the Gospels are exceptionally well attested. The purpose of the Gospels, however, was not to present depositions or present testimony from the witness stand, but to be independent narrations with a faith perspective. The resurrection can be established independent of the historicity of Gospels from facts accepted by nearly all critics (see, for example, Habermas, chap. 5).

Paul's Testimony for Resurrection. Martin and many other critics accept the authenticity of 1 Corinthians 15 , along with its early date of about A.D. 55–56. This chapter alone is deadly to Martin's argument. Paul recorded eyewitness reports from as early as five years after the events and no later than twenty-five years after them, and his own eyewitness account of a post-resurrection appearance of Christ. We have other data to confirm Paul's testimony. For example, Paul's creedal material is supportive data. Martin's denial to the contrary, the Gospels were written early enough to confirm the events. And sermons in Acts confirm it (Acts 2 , 10 , 13 ; *see* ACTS, HISTORICITY OF). In these sermons, historical details are given (Jesus eating with the disciples). Indeed, the common theme of the sermons is the resurrection.

Martin's List of "Delusions." Martin claimed that the disciples were victims of a psychosis *folie a deus* . They had divine delusions. But his evidence is purely circumstantial. Furthermore, the disciples do not show accepted characteristics of deluded individuals. They were, in fact, so convinced and convincing that they were willing to die for their witness and so were their spiritual descendants. Psychosis *folie a deus* has no evidence for it and much against it.

Conclusion. Martin cannot support his contention that Jesus is not even a historical person. Even granting his own premises, one can demonstrate the historicity of Jesus. Further, there is strong reason to reject Martin's late dates for the Gospels. Once the earlier dates are acknowledged, the historicity of Jesus is a given; only the details are left for debate.

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Martyr, Justin. *See* JUSTIN MARTYR .

Marx, Karl. Karl Marx (1818–1883) was one of the most influential of all modern atheists (*see* ATHEISM). His German-Jewish family was converted to Lutheranism when he was six. He was

influenced heavily by the idealism of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831), under whom he studied, and he adopted the atheism of fellow student, Ludwig Feuerbach (1804–1872). After some radical political activity, which led to his expulsion from France (1845), he joined Friedrich Engels to produce *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). With the economic support of Engels' prosperous textile business, Marx spent years of research in the British Museum producing *Das Kapital* (1867).

God and Religion. Even as a college student, Marx was a militant atheist who believed that the “criticism of religion is the foundation of all criticism.” For this criticism Marx drew heavily on the radical young Hegelian named Feuerbach .

Engels spoke of “the influence which Feuerbach, more than any other post-Hegelian philosopher, had upon us” (*Marx and Engels on Religion*, 214). He triumphantly spoke of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* which “with one blow . . . pulverized [religion] . . . in that without circumlocution it placed materialism on the throne again” (ibid., 224). Marx drew three principles from Feuerbach:

First, “man is the highest essence for man” (ibid., 50). This means there is a categorical imperative to overthrow anything—especially religion—which debases humanity. Secondly, “Man makes religion; religion does not make man” (ibid., 41). Religion is the self-consciousness of the human being who feels lost without some identification with a “God.” Third, religion is “the fantastic reflection in men's minds of those external forces which control their daily life, a reflection in which the terrestrial forces assume the form of supernatural forces” (ibid., 147). God is a projection of human imagination. God did not make the human being in his image; the human being has made a god in his image (*see* SIGMUND FREUD).

Marx's atheism , however, went well beyond that of Feuerbach. Marx agreed with the materialists that “matter is not a product of mind, but mind itself is merely the highest product of matter” (ibid., 231). Marx objected that Feuerbach did not follow the implications of his ideas into the social domain, for “he by no means wishes to abolish religion; he wants to perfect it” (ibid., 237). “Feuerbach,” reasoned Marx, “does not see that the ‘religious sentiment’ is itself a social product” (ibid., 71). Hence, does not grasp the significance of ‘revolutionary,’ of ‘practical-critical,’ activity” (ibid., 69). In the words of Marxism's slogan, “Religion is the opiate of the people” (ibid., 35). People take the drug of religion “because this world is not adequate to assure man of his complete accomplishment and integrated development, [so] he compensates himself with the image of another, more perfect world” (ibid., 36).

In the Marxist evolutionary conception of the universe, there is absolutely no room for a Creator or a Ruler (*see* EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL). Deism 's supreme being, who is shut out from the whole existing world, is a contradiction in terms. Concluded Marx, the only service to be rendered to God is to make atheism a compulsory article of faith and prohibit religion generally (ibid., 143). Marx rejects even agnosticism: “What, indeed, is agnosticism but, to use an expressive Lancashire term, ‘shamefaced’ materialism? The agnostic conception of nature is materialistic throughout” (ibid., 295).

Marx was under no delusion that religion would immediately die when socialism was adopted. Since religion is but a reflex of the real world, religion will not vanish until “the practical relations of every-day life offer to man none but perfectly intelligible and reasonable relations with regard to his fellowmen and to nature” (ibid., 136). The communist utopia must be realized before religion is no more.

Human Beings. Marxism holds a materialistic view of human origins and nature (*see* MATERIALISM). This, of course, entailed naturalistic evolution. *Das Kapital* came only eight years after Charles Darwin 's *On the Origin of Species* was published in 1859. Evolution was a helpful addition to Marx's materialistic framework. “Mind is the product of matter.” That is, mind evolved from material stuff. The nonliving (matter) has always been (*see* EVOLUTION, COSMIC). The nonliving has produced the living (*see* EVOLUTION, CHEMICAL), and finally, the nonintelligent has produced the intelligent (*see* EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL).

Marx wrote his doctoral thesis at the University of Jena (1841) on the materialistic philosophies of the Greek philosophers Epicurus and Democritus. Adding in the support of Darwinian evolution he could explain, without God, the origin of human life as the product of evolutionary processes in a material world.

Marx dismissed pure philosophy as speculation, compared to the vital task of changing the world (Marx, *Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*, 82). Hence, he was not particularly interested in philosophical materialism. As a materialist he did not deny mind altogether. He believed that everything about man, including the mind, was determined by material conditions. “For us, mind is a mode of energy, a function of brain; all we know is that the material world is governed by immutable laws, and so forth” (Marx, *Marx and Engels on Religion*, 298). This view would fit what philosophers call epiphenomenalism, that consciousness is nonmaterial but that it is dependent on material things for its existence. Certainly life after death was an illusion (*see* IMMORTALITY).

Karl Marx was more interested in the concrete social being. He believed “the real nature of man is the total of *social* nature” (ibid., 83). Apart from such obvious biological facts as the need for food, Marx tended to downplay individual existence. He believed that what was true of one person at one time in one society was true of all at all times in all places (ibid., 91, 92). The consciousness determines human being, but social being determines consciousness (ibid., 67). Sociology is not reducible to psychology. One central generalization was that the human is a socially active being distinguished from other animals in that people *produce* their means of subsistence (ibid., 69). They work for their living. Thus, Marx concludes, it is right to work, to have a life of productive activity.

Those who do not find fulfillment in industrial labor experience alienation. This alienation will be eliminated when private property is done away with (ibid., 250). Private property, however, is not the cause but a consequence of alienation (ibid., 176). Alienation itself consists in the fact that the worker is forced to bring fulfillment to someone else, instead of finding personal fulfillment. Even the objects produced are owned by another. The cure for this ill is the future communist society in which the individual can be fulfilled by working for the good of the whole (ibid., 177, 253).

World and History. Marx's overall view of the world is both materialistic and dialectic. Marx used the term *historical materialism* for the "view of the course of history which seeks the ultimate cause and the great moving power of all important events in the economic development of society" (*Marx and Engels on Religion*, 298). When this is applied specifically to history Marx is a *dialectical* materialist who looks for thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. History is unfolding according to a universal dialectic law that can be predicted the way an astronomer predicts an eclipse. In the preface to *Das Kapital*, Marx compared his method to that of a physicist and said, "the ultimate aim of this work is to lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society," and he also spoke of the natural laws of capitalistic production as "working with iron necessity toward inevitable results" (*Das Kapital*, "Preface").

The nature of the dialectic of modern history is that the thesis of capitalism is opposed by the antithesis of socialism, which will give way to the ultimate synthesis of communism. History is predetermined like the course of the stars, except the laws governing history are not mechanical but economic (*see* DETERMINISM). Humanity is economically determined. That is, "the mode of production of material life determines the general character of social, political, and spiritual processes of life" (*ibid.*, 67, 70, 90, 111f.). There are other factors as well, but the economic is a primary factor of social determination. Engels emphatically proclaimed, "more than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase" (*Marx and Engels on Religion*, 274).

The Future. Based on his knowledge of the dialectic of history and economic determinism, Marx confidently predicted that capitalism would become increasingly unstable and that the class struggle between the bourgeois (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class) would intensify. Thus the poor would become larger and poorer until, by a major social revolution, they would seize power and institute the new communist phase of history (*ibid.*, 79–80, 147f., 236).

The fact that these predictions did not come to pass was an embarrassment to Marxist theory. That almost the opposite has happened has been the near-demise of Marxism.

Communist Utopia. According to Marx, capitalism has its own internal contradictions. For as the masses become more numerous and the capitalists fewer, the latter would control great concentrations of productive equipment which they would throttle for their own gain. The masses would sweep aside the capitalists as a hindrance to production and seize the industrial economy. In the emerging progressive society there would be no wages, no money, no social classes, and eventually no state. This communist utopia would simply be a free association of producers under their own conscious control. Society would move ultimately "from each according to his ability to each according to his need" (*ibid.*, 263). There would, however, be an intermediate period of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" (*ibid.*, 261). But in the higher stage the state would vanish and true freedom begin.

Ethics. There are several characteristic dimensions of the ethics of Marxism. Three of these are relativism (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF), utilitarianism, and collectivism.

Relativism. Since Marxism is an atheism, and since as Nietzsche noted that when God dies all absolute value dies with him, then it is understandable that Marxism's ethic is relativistic. There are no moral absolutes. There are two reasons for this. First, there is no external, eternal realm. The only absolute is the unfolding dialectic world process. Engels wrote, "we therefore reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatever as an eternal, ultimate and forever immutable law on the pretext that the moral world has its permanent principles which transcend history" (*see* Hunt, 87–88).

Second, there is no foundational nature or essence for general principles of human conduct. Ideas of good and evil are determined by the socio-economic structure. Class struggle generates its own ethic.

Utilitarianism. The standard for morality is its contribution to creation of a communist society. Whatever promotes the ultimate cause of communism is good, and what hinders it is evil. Actions can be justified by their end. Lenin once defined morality as that which serves to destroy the exploiting capitalistic society and to unite workers in creating a new communist society (*ibid.*, 89). Thus the end justifies the means. Some neo-Marxists have rejected this, insisting that means are subject to the same moral principles as the end. But they have departed from orthodox Marxism. This is the communist's equivalent of utilitarianism's "greatest good for the greatest number in the long run."

Collectivism. In the Marxist ethic, the universal transcends the individual. This is a heritage from Hegel who believed that the perfect life is possible only when the individual is organically integrated into the ethical totality. For Marx, however, the highest ethical totality is not the state, as it was for Hegel, but "universal freedom of will." However, this "freedom" (*see* FREE WILL) is not individual but corporate and universal. The difference from Hegel is that the apex is shifted from the state to society, from the body politic to the body public.

In the perfect society private morals are eliminated and the ethical ideals of the community are achieved. This will be determined by material production. Material production determines religion, metaphysics, and morality.

Evaluation. Positive Contributions. Marx's concern for the condition of workers is to be commended. Working conditions are vastly improved today from those over a century ago when Marx wrote. Likewise, Marx is just in attacking the view that workers are a means to the end of capital gain. People should not be used as an end to things, even things desired by other people. Thus, Marxism has made a significant contribution to the social ethos that places the person over money.

Marxism has been a corrective on unlimited, uncontrolled capitalism. Any system which permits the rich to get richer and the poor poorer without moral limits is abusive. In ancient Jewish economy this possibility was checked by the year of Jubilee (one year every half century) when acquisitions were returned to their original owners.

The utopian aspirations of Marxism are noble. Marxism has been both a philosophy of history and a goal for overcoming perceived evils in the world. This vision has captured the imagination and dedication of many idealistic thinkers.

Negative Elements. Unfortunately, the harmful aspects of Marxism are significant. At the center of these is a militant, dogmatic atheism. It is self-defeating to insist that God is *nothing but* a projection of human imagination. “Nothing but” statements presume “more than” knowledge. One cannot know that “God” is confined only to imagination unless knowledge about God goes beyond mere imagination.

Marx’s deterministic view of history is contrary to fact. Things have not worked out as Marx predicted. Marxist historical theory also is a category mistake, assuming that economic influences work like physical laws.

Materialism, as a view of humanity, ignores the rich spiritual and religious aspects of human nature, to say nothing of the evidence for human immateriality and immortality. Related to this is a view of human origins based on a flawed view of naturalistic evolution. This view has been shown to be an inadequate explanation of human origins. Marx’s metaphysics is generally antiscientific, ruling out the possibility of miracles. But this view has crucial philosophical flaws, as noted in the article [MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST](#).

Ethical relativism is self-destructive in its strongest form. The absolute denial of absolutes cuts its own throat, replacing one absolute with another. Socialist society has hardly avoided absolutism. Also, the fallacies of the “end justifies the means” ethic are infamous.

Marxism holds out an admirable idealism of goals (a human utopia) but demonstrates a miserable record of achievement. Reality in Marxist countries has brought millions closer to hell than paradise. While the goal of a perfect community is desirable, the revolutionary means of achieving it have resulted in mass destruction unparalleled in human history. From a Christian perspective the means of transforming humankind is not revolution but regeneration. Freedom is not by the birth of a new government but by the birth of a new inner person—that is, the new birth. Marx’s view of religion was superficial. He should have heeded his father’s exhortation to him at age 17: “Faith [in God] is a real [requirement] of man sooner or later, and there are moments in life when even the atheist is involuntarily drawn to worship the Almighty” (“Letter from Trier,” 18 November 1835).

Marx also might have applied his own thoughts when he said, “Union with Christ bestows inner exaltation, consolation in suffering, calm assurance, and a heart which is open to love of mankind, to all that is noble, to all that is great, not out of ambition, not through the desire for fame, but only because of Christ” (written by Marx as a teenager between August 10 and 16, 1835).

Marx’s own father feared it was the desire for fame which transformed Karl’s Christian conscience into a demonic desire. In March 1837, he admonished his ambitious son, saying,

At times I cannot rid myself of ideas which arouse in me sad forebodings and fear when I am struck as if by lightning by the thought: is your heart in accord with your head, your talents? Has it room for the earthly but gentler sentiments which in this vale of sorrow are so essentially consoling for a man of feeling? *And since that heart is obviously animated and governed by a demon not granted to all men, is that demon heavenly or Faustian?* [*Selected Writings* , emphasis added]

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Mary, Apparitions of. Many persons claim to see appearances of the Virgin Mary or other Roman Catholic saints. These appearances are sometimes used as verification for some doctrine or truth claim connected with the Roman Catholic Church. Are these true miracles? Do they have any apologetic value in establishing truth claims?

The Apologetic Value of Apparitions. The apparitions of Mary are not really connected with a specific truth claim (*see* [MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF](#)). Mary did not announce that she was God in feminine flesh and then proceed to prove it by miracles. The connections to truth claims are generally made by those who saw the apparition. It is usually not clear what the specific claim would be.

Even when specific claims are associated with the event, the alleged miraculous nature of the event is challengeable. Leading Roman Catholic authorities reject the authority of most claims that Mary has appeared. Since most of these appearances are of a basic experiential nature, it raises questions about the validity of the rest of the claims. At best the apparitions add a note of confusion to doctrinal debate, and God is never a God of confusion.

Many of the appearances have natural explanations or are a spiritualization of natural phenomena (for example, a cloud formation or reflection of light through a window). Some fit all the criteria for being hallucinations. Of the small number of hard-core events that escape purely natural explanations, some may be explained as demonic deceptions. The few apparitions with an objective basis in reality have signs of Satanic deception characteristic of false miracles (*see* [MIRACLES, FALSE](#)). The apparitions lack unique features of a true miracle, as are described in the articles [Miracle](#) and [Miracles, Apologetic Value of](#). They tend to be associated with adoration

of a statue, crucifix, or icon, which is an idolatrous form of worship (see Exod. 20:4). Some involve communication with the dead (see Deut. 18:11) and false teaching (see 1 Timothy 4), such as veneration of Mary or relics (see Geisler and MacKenzie, chap. 15).

There are also similar occurrences in other religions, so any conflicting truth claims associated with them are self-canceling, since neither of two opposing truth claims can be supported if their evidence is of the same kind. Buddhists have visions of Buddha, Hindus of Krishna, and many cultists of unbiblical forms of Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) is largely founded on angelic appearances to Joseph Smith and sustained by visions seen by the “apostles” of the church, yet the Mormon Christ is the brother of Lucifer and the result of sexual union between God (who has a physical body) and Mary. There are many conflicting, self-canceling visions and appearances, but no pious visionary has been able to miraculously substantiate his or her claims as did Jesus (see CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF). He performed unparalleled, objectively demonstrable miracles (see MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE ; RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR).

Conclusion. Whatever status apparitions of Mary may have as unusual events, they do not show evidence of being true miracles (see MIRACLE ; MIRACLES, MAGIC AND). On the contrary, their association with occult practices and false teaching shows that they are not supernatural acts of God. Since they are unconnected with clear truth claims and are not unique events unparalleled in other religions, they have no apologetic value in establishing truth claims (see MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF).

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Materialism. *Materialism* believes that all is matter or reducible to it. *Pantheism* , by contrast, holds that all is mind. Theists (see THEISM) hold that Mind produced matter, and materialists that matter produced mind (see ATHEISM). In rigid materialism “mind” does not really exist, only matter. According to soft materialism or Epiphenomenalism, mind exists but is dependent on matter the way a shadow of a tree depends on the tree.

Thomas Hobbes defined matter:

The world (I mean not the earth only, that denominates the lovers of it “worldly men,” but the *universe* , that is, the whole mass of all things that are) is corporeal, that is to say, body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth: also every part of body is likewise body, and hath the like dimensions; and consequently every part of the universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the universe: and because the universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and consequently nowhere. [269]

Basic Tenets. All materialists hold several basic beliefs in common (such as, everything is made of matter [energy]). Most materialists share other beliefs, such as humans are not immortal (see IMMORTALITY).

Matter Is All There Is. As Carl Sagan put it, the Cosmos is all that was, is, or ever will be. Everything is matter or reducible to it and dependent on it. If matter were to cease to exist, nothing would remain.

Matter Is Eternal. Most materialists believe matter has always been. Or, as one atheist put it, if matter came to be, it came into existence from nothing and by nothing (Kenny, 66; see CREATION, VIEWS OF). The material universe is self-sustaining and self-generating. It is probably eternal, but if it came to be, then it came to be on its own without outside help. Isaac Asimov speculated that the probability is equally good that nothing came from nothing or that something came out of nothing. As luck would have it, something emerged (Asimov, 148). So matter is eternal, or else it came from nothing spontaneously.

Traditional materialists believed there were innumerable indestructible little hard pellets of reality called *atoms* (see ATOMISM). With the splitting of the atom and the emergence of Einstein ’s $E=MC^2$ (energy = mass times speed of light squared), materialists now speak of the indestructibility of energy. They appeal to the first law of thermodynamics, claiming that “energy can neither be created nor destroyed.” Energy does not pass out of existence; it simply takes on new forms. Even at death, all the elements of our being are reabsorbed by the environment and reused. The process goes on forever (see THERMODYNAMICS, LAWS OF).

There Is No Creator. Another premise of strict materialism is atheism or nontheism. That is, either there is no God or, at least, no need for a God. As the *Humanist Manifesto II* put it, “As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity” (Kurtz, 16). According to the nontheistic view of creation out of matter, no cause is needed to bring matter into existence or to form matter already in existence. There is neither a Creator nor a Maker (Former) of the world. The world explains itself.

Humans Are Mortal. Another implication of this view is that there is no immortal, never-dying “soul” or spiritual aspect to human beings (see IMMORTALITY). As *Humanist Manifesto I* noted, “the traditional dualism of mind and body must be rejected.” A materialist believes modern science discredits any spiritual or soul dimension (Kurtz, 8, 16–17). There is no mind, only a chemical reaction in the brain. Less stringent materialists admit the existence of a soul but

deny that it can exist independently of matter. For them the soul is to the body what the image in the mirror is to the one looking at it. When the body dies, so does the soul. When matter disintegrates, the mind is also destroyed.

Humans Are Not Unique. Materialists differ regarding the nature of human beings. Most accord a special status to humans as the highest point in the evolutionary process (*see* EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL). That doesn't allow a qualitative difference from animals. Humans differ only in degree, not in kind, from lower forms of life. Human beings are the highest and latest animal form on the evolutionary ladder, with more highly developed abilities than fellow primates (*see* HUMANISM, SECULAR).

Argument for Materialism. The Nature of Self-Consciousness. In order for there to be more than matter, the mind must consciously survive death. But the mind cannot function without the brain. Therefore, when the brain dies consciousness ceases at the same time. This argument assumes that consciousness is a physical function, that "mind" is a function of matter. Mind is only a process within the brain. There is no proof for such an assumption.

Also unwarranted is the assumption that, because the mind and brain function *together*, they must be identical. A corollary assumption is that I am nothing but my brain. This is reductionist fallacy. Things that go together are not necessarily the same, any more than ideas expressed by these words are the same as the words themselves. Mind and brain could interact without being the same.

Dependence of Consciousness. In a modified form of materialism, *epiphenomenalism*, the mind is not identical to the brain, but it is dependent on the physical brain, the way a shadow is dependent on a tree. This again assumes, though it does not prove, that the mind is dependent on the brain. Certain mental functions can be explained in physical ways, but that does not mean they are dependent on physical processes. If there is a spiritual, as well as a physical, dimension to reality, the mind shows every sign of being able to function in either. Neurobiology is an empirical science, but these scientists freely admit that they have not come close to isolating the "I." They can quantify mind-brain interactions, but there has been no success in learning the qualities of emotional or self response.

Access to the World. Materialists insist that the mind or self gains access to the world through the brain. Death destroys the brain, so death closes that door. The brain is certainly one way of access, but we cannot know if it is the only way of access to this world. It may or may not be. More to the point is that there may be another world, or even multiple dimensions, with wholly different kinds of access. And there may be ways to be conscious other than through interaction with the physical world. If there are spiritual beings, God and angels, and the evidence is that there are (*see* GOD, EVIDENCE FOR), they are certainly conscious without a physical body gateway to the world. The possibility of this spiritual dimension, of course, is what the materialist wants to avoid admitting, but there is no reason to do so.

The Necessity of Embodiment. Materialists reason that no person can survive without a body, and death destroys the body. So it destroys personhood. This begs the question by defining "person" in an arbitrary way that is unwarranted by our knowledge. We do not have the

information that death destroys personhood for the reasons already stated. At best we can say that death severs one dimension of consciousness—this-world consciousness. We can still be self-conscious, God-conscious, and conscious of another world.

Evaluation. Since materialists hold many beliefs in common with other atheists and agnostics, these beliefs are discussed in their respective articles. Their antisupernaturalism (*see* MIRACLE) is without philosophical grounds. Likewise, their acceptance of evolution (*see* EVOLUTION ; EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL ; EVOLUTION, COSMIC) is without scientific justification.

Materialist arguments are self-defeating. "Nothing but" statements assume "more than" knowledge. How could I know I am nothing more than my brain unless I was more than it? I cannot analyze my brain in a test tube unless I am outside the test tube.

At the heart of materialism is the rejection of the existence of mind or spirit as a separate entity that survives the dissolution of matter. Mind, rather, is really matter, or at least dependent on matter.

Strict Materialism Is Self-Defeating. The pure materialist view is clearly self-defeating (*see* Lewis, chap. 3). For surely the materialist *theory* is not made up of matter. That is, the *theory* about matter has no matter in it. The *idea* that all is made of molecules does not itself consist of molecules. For the *thought* about all matter must itself stand over and above matter. If the thought about matter is part of matter then it cannot be a thought about *all* matter, since being a part of matter it cannot transcend itself to make a pronouncement about *all* matter.

Mind (or its thought) only can transcend matter if it is more than matter. If it is more than matter, then matter is not all that exists. Whatever is material is limited to a region of space and time. If it moves, it moves in space and time. But the mind is not so limited. It roams the universe without leaving the room. Even the materialist speaks of personal thoughts. But if strict materialism were correct there could be no discrete thoughts. They would be a mere stream of electrons or some other material particle. Only a self-conscious being can truly make thoughts. Materialists want people to agree with their doctrine and accept their views. However, this is not possible if the views are correct. If consciousness is merely the result of a flow of electrons, persons are material processes, not free human beings.

Modified Materialism Is Self-Defeating. Some materialists admit that mind is more than matter but deny that mind can exist independent of matter. They insist that mind is more than matter the way the whole is more than the sum of its parts. And yet the whole ceases to exist when the parts do. For instance, a whole automobile engine has something more than all its individual parts spread over the floor of the garage. Nonetheless, when the parts are destroyed, the "whole" engine is destroyed too. Likewise, a mind is more than matter but it is dependent on matter and ceases to exist when man's material parts dissolve.

Although this materialistic argument is less apparently self-defeating than the first one, it is nonetheless equally wrong. It affirms that mind is ultimately dependent on matter. But the statement "mind is dependent on matter" does not claim to depend for its truth upon matter. In fact, it claims to be a truth about all mind and matter. But no truth about *all* matter can be

dependent for its truth upon matter. One cannot stand outside all matter to make an affirmation about all matter and yet simultaneously claim he is really standing inside matter, being dependent upon it. If my mind is completely dependent on matter, then it can't make statements from a vantage point beyond matter. And if its statements are not from a standpoint independent of matter, then they are not really statements about *all* matter. For one must step beyond something to see it all. The whole cannot be seen from within. It claims to have transcendent knowledge with only an immanent basis of operation.

Mind Transcends Matter. While materialists attempt to reduce everything to matter rather than mind, it would appear that in an epistemological sense at least, just the opposite is true. For whatever analysis I make of matter, there is always an "I" that stands outside the object of my analysis. Indeed, even when I analyze myself, there is an "I" that transcends the "me." I can never capture my transcendental I (ego). I can only catch it, as it were, out of "the corner of my eye." Even if I attempt to put my "I" in the test-tube of analysis it becomes a me at which the elusive I is looking. There is always more than me; there is the I that is not merely me. Contrary to materialism, then, everything is reducible to (i.e., ultimately dependent on) the I.

Mind is prior to and independent of matter.

Matter Is Not Eternal. There is strong evidence for what scientists have come to call the Big Bang origin of the universe, showing that matter had a beginning. The *kalam* cosmological argument demonstrates that the material universe has a cause. But the cause of all matter cannot itself be matter; hence something more than matter exists. As Karl Marx put it, either matter produced mind, or mind produced matter. Since matter was produced, Mind must have produced it.

Law Giver Was Immaterial. Another way to demonstrate that all is not matter is known as the Moral Argument for God . It can be phrased:

1. There is an objective moral law (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF).
2. The moral law is prescriptive, not descriptive.
3. What is prescriptive is not part of the descriptive material world.
4. So there is an immaterial objective reality. More than matter exists (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* , 17–19).

Conclusions. All of the arguments in favor of materialism are essentially self-defeating. Any attempt to deny that there is a reality beyond the material implies that a nonmaterial reality, such as the mind, exists. Materialism is an untenable position.

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Metaphysics. *Metaphysics* (lit. "beyond the physical) is the study of being or reality. It is used interchangeably with *ontology* (Gk. *ontos* , "being," and *logos* , "word about").

Metaphysics is the discipline in philosophy which answers such questions as: What is real? (*see* REALISM); Is reality one or many? (*see* ONE AND MANY, PROBLEM OF); Is reality material or immaterial? (*see* MATERIALISM); Is it natural (*see* NATURALISM) or supernatural? (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). Another important metaphysical problem has to whether being is univocal or analogical (*see* ANALOGY, PRINCIPLE OF).

In the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, metaphysics is defined as the study of being insofar as it is being. Physics is the study of being insofar as it is physical. Mathematics is the study of being insofar as it is quantifiable.

Mill, John Stuart. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) embraced a finite god (*see* FINITE GODISM) worldview, with a logical positivism that took a strong anti-metaphysical stand (*see* AYER, A. J .). He is usually known as a pioneer in modern scientific thinking. He devised rules for inductive scientific reasoning (*see* INDUCTIVE METHOD) and was a fountain head of ethical utilitarianism. Mill elaborated the canons of inductive scientific thought first stated by Francis Bacon (1561–1626) in *Novum Organum* (1620).

A Small God. Mill rejected the traditional teleological argument as expounded by William Paley . He reasoned that Paley's argument is built on analogy, that similarity in effect implies similarity in cause. This kind of analogy weakens as dissimilarities become greater. Watches imply watchmakers only because, by previous experience, we know that watchmakers make watches. There is nothing intrinsic in the watch to demand a craftsman's hand. In like manner, footprints imply human beings and dung implies animals because previous experience informs us that this connection is appropriate. It is not that there is intrinsic design in the remains. Therefore, Mill concluded, Paley's argument is weak.

Mill went on to offer what he considered a stronger expression of the teleological argument, built on an inductive “method of agreement.” This argument was the weakest of Mill’s inductive methods, but he considered the teleological argument to be a strong form of this kind of induction. Mill began with the organic rather than the mechanical aspect of nature:

1. There is an amazing concurrence of diverse elements in the human eye.
2. It is not probable that random selection brought these elements together.
3. The method of agreement argues for a common cause of the eye.
4. The cause was a final (purposing) cause, not an efficient (producing) cause.

Mill said that biological evolution, if true, diminishes the strength of even this stronger form of the teleological argument. For much of what appears to be design is accounted for in evolution by the survival of the fittest (see Geisler, *Philosophy of Religion*, 177–84).

Mill’s reasoning led him to posit a finite God:

A Being of great but limited power, how or by what limited we cannot even conjecture; of great, and perhaps unlimited intelligence, but perhaps, also, more narrowly limited than his power: who desires, and pays some regard to, the happiness of his creatures, but who seems to have other motives of action which he cares more for, and who can hardly be supposed to have created the universe for that purpose alone. [“Nature,” in *Three Essays on Religion*, 194; except where noted, subsequent quotations will be from this essay]

Such a description limits God in power and goodness. We can infer from nature that God has benevolent feelings toward his creatures, “but to jump from this to the inference that his sole or chief purposes are those of benevolence, and that the single end and aim of creation was the happiness of his creatures, is not only not justified by any evidence but is a conclusion in opposition to such evidence as we have” (192). Mill’s deity cannot foresee the future or what will come of his acts. He is not omnipotent. The evidence shows an intelligence superior to any human being’s, but the fact that God uses means to reach ends shows that he is limited. “Who would have recourse to means if to attain his end his mere word was sufficient?” (177).

While he believed there could be many creators, he favored the idea that there was only one (ibid., 133). Other than the general principles of nature’s design, there is little reason to believe the Creator benevolent. Nature is not directed toward a particularly moral end, if there is a goal at all (189).

The limitations of God are in himself, not simply caused by the world or other beings. He cannot control the qualities and forces of the fabric of the universe. The materials of the universe do not allow God to more completely fulfill his purposes, or else he did not know how to accomplish it (186).

Creation. The universe was not created out of nothing, according to Mill. “The indication given by such evidence as there is, points to the creation, not indeed of the universe, but of the present order of it by an Intelligent Mind, whose power over the materials was not absolute” (243). In fact, there is from nature no reason to suppose that either matter or force were made by the Being who put them together in the ways they now appear. It is unclear that he has power to alter any of the properties of matter. Matter and energy are, therefore, eternal. Out of them God constructed a world by working with the materials and properties at hand (178).

In positing a finite God and eternal matter, Mill followed Plato into a theistic dualism. Creation is not *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) or *ex deo* (out of God). Rather, it is *ex materia* (out of preexisting matter; see CREATION, VIEWS OF).

Mill believed in a material universe he called “Nature.” *Nature* is the entire system of material, with all its properties (64). It is “all facts, actual and possible” or “the mode . . . in which all things take place” (5–6). Since all things take place in a uniform way, we can speak of *laws* of nature. “All phenomena which have been sufficiently examined are found to take place with regularity, even having certain fixed conditions, positive and negative, on the occurrence of which it invariably happens” (ibid.). It is the task of science to learn those conditions.

Miracles. Mill held that the finite god is the author of Nature’s laws and could intervene in the affairs of humanity, though there is no evidence that he does. Mill agrees with David Hume that “the testimony of experience against miracles is undeviating and indubitable” (221). Mill takes another route to reach Hume’s antisupernatural conclusion (see MIRACLE; NATURALISM). Mill believed that an unusual occurrence, even if it defeats a well established law, is merely discovery of another law, previously unknown (221).

So whatever new phenomena are discovered still depend on law and are always exactly reproduced when the same circumstances are repeated (222). A miracle claims to supersede natural laws, not just cancel out one natural law with another. Such a breaking of law cannot be accepted. How is Mill so certain that there is a natural explanation for every event? He draws proof from the absence of all experience of a supernatural cause and the frequent experience of natural causes:

The commonest principles of sound judgment forbid us to suppose for any effect as cause of which we have absolutely no experience, unless all those of which we have experience are ascertained to be absent. Now there are few things of which we have more frequent experience than of physical facts which our knowledge does not enable us to account for. [229–30]

There is, therefore, nothing to exclude the supposition that every “miracle” has a natural cause, and as long as that supposition is possible, “no man of ordinary practical judgment, would assume of conjecture a cause which no reason existed for supposing to be real, save the necessity of accounting for something which is sufficiently accounted for without it” (231).

Miracles cannot be ruled impossible so long as there is a God. Mill believed that “If we had the direct testimony of our senses to a supernatural fact, it might be as completely authenticated

and made certain as any natural one.” Pending that personal contact, miracles have no historical claim, and they are invalid as evidence of revelation (239).

Evil and Ethics. One of the most convincing evidences of God’s finitude was the presence of evil in the world (*see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF ; FINITE GODISM ; KUSHNER, HAROLD). Mill concluded that “if the maker of the world can [do] all that he will, he wills misery, and there is no escape from the conclusion” (37). Men are hanged for doing what Nature does in killing every being that lives. Much of the time that death comes with torture. Nature has total disregard for mercy and justice, treating the noblest and the worst people alike. Such evils were absolutely inconsistent with an all-powerful, all-good being. The best he could hope for was a partially good deity with limited power (29–30). In view of Nature’s gross evil, it would be irrational and immoral to use natural law as the model for action. Human duty is not to imitate nature but to amend it. Some aspects of nature may be good, but “it has never been settled by any accredited doctrine, what particular departments of the order of nature shall be reputed to be designed for our moral instruction and guidance” (42). At any rate, it is impossible to decide what in nature expresses the character of God.

Since ethics cannot be based in revelation or the supernatural, there are obviously no absolute maxims of morality (99). Having rejected moral absolutes (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF), Mill devised the utilitarian calculus by which one is obligated to do what he or she can to bring the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run.

Mill had great respect for the moral example of Jesus (253–54). But when it came to spelling what the Christian “golden rule” meant, Mill believed utilitarianism was the answer. We should so act to bring the greatest good to the greatest number. There are no ethical absolutes. There may be times when a lie brings about more good than does the truth. Our best guide is experience, through which we can develop general guidelines (*Utilitarianism* , chap. 2).

Human Destiny. A human being is mind and soul as well as material body. There is no evidence, then, that the soul could not be immortal. There simply isn’t any evidence in favor of an immortal soul, either (*see* IMMORTALITY). Mill believed it certain that souls did not become “ghosts” who bothered with human affairs. Beyond that there was only a hope (201, 208–10). Of one thing he was confident: *If* there is life after death, “nothing can be more opposed to every estimate we can form of probability, than the common idea of the future life as a state of rewards and punishments (*see* HELL) in any other sense than that the consequences of our actions upon our own character and susceptibilities will follow us in the future as they have done in the past and present” (210–11). Any future life will simply continue life now. To assume a radical break at death in the change of the mode of our existence is contrary to all analogies drawn from this life. We must assume the same laws of nature will apply.

Despite the lack of evidence for immortality, life here and now is worth living, as is the effort to cultivate the improvement of character (250). There is also ground for optimism about the human race:

The conditions of human existence are highly favorable to the growth of such a feeling inasmuch as a battle is constantly going on, in which the humblest human creature

is not incapable of taking some part, between the powers of good and those of evil, and in which even the smallest help to the right side has its value in promoting the very slow and often insensible progress by which good is gradually gaining ground from evil, yet gaining it so visibly at considerable intervals as to promise the very distant but not uncertain final victory of good. [256]

Not only did Mill express optimism about the final victory over evil, but he believed that humanistic efforts in this direction were sure to become the new religion. For “to do something during life, on even the humblest scale if nothing more is within reach, towards bringing this consummation ever so little nearer, is the most animating and invigorating thought which can inspire a human creature” (257).

Evaluation. Inadequate View of God. Philosophically, a finite god is not self-explaining. Such a god is contrary to the principle of causality that affirms a cause for every finite being. A finite god is only a large creature, who needs a Creator. A finite being is a contingent, not a necessary, being. A contingent being is one that can not exist. Whatever could not exist depends for its existence on a Necessary Being, which cannot not exist (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT).

Further, a god who is not absolutely perfect is not God in the ultimate sense. One could measure his imperfection only by an ultimate standard of perfection. But the ultimate perfection is, by definition, God. So if there were an imperfect finite god, he would be something less than ultimate God. Since Mill’s God engages in evil, one could say that his argument best proves the existence of a Devil. At any rate, anything incompletely good is not worthy of worship. Worship attributes ultimate worth to something. Why should one attribute absolute worth to what is not absolutely worthy? Every finite being is a creature, and worship of the creature is idolatry. Or to borrow terms from Paul *Tillich, *ultimate commitment* should not be given to something less than an *Ultimate* . A partially good creature is not an Ultimate.

Some finite godists attempt to avoid this criticism by positing a God limited in power but not perfection. This seems arbitrary and wishful thinking. How can God be an infinitely good Being when he is only a finite being? How can one be more of anything than he has the capacity to be? How can the attributes of God be extended further than his nature allows?

Finally, a finite god offers no assurance that evil will be defeated. Since a religious commitment is an ultimate commitment, we are ultimately committed to the cause of good, which may not ultimately succeed. Can a finite god who cannot guarantee victory really inspire ultimate commitment? How many people will really make an ultimate commitment to work for what they have no assurance will ultimately win? One can be inspired to confess courageously, “I would rather lose in a battle that is ultimately going to win, than to win in a battle that will ultimately lose.” A finite god lacks the assurance to engender such motivation.

Inadequate View of Evil. The problem of evil does not eliminate God or his goodness. It calls for an infinitely powerful and perfect God to eliminate it. One cannot even know there are ultimate injustices without knowing some ultimately just Being beyond the world. Only an

infinitely powerful and perfect God can defeat evil. Only an all-powerful God can defeat evil; only an all-good God desires that defeat. A finite god will not suffice (*see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF).

Mill makes a category mistake in arguing that God is not perfect because he kills in a way that would be murder among humans. God is Creator of life, and he has the right to take away what he gives (Deut. 32:39 ; Job 1:21). We did not create life; we do not have the right to take it. The gardener who is sovereign over the flowers and bushes in his or her own yard lacks the right to cut down those belonging to the neighbors. Those who own them are in control of them. God owns all life. He can take it if he wants without failing any moral law.

Inadequate View of Miracles. Mill's rejection of miracles, like that of Hume, begs the question. Mill bases belief in methods that preassume naturalism (*see* MIRACLE ; MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). He assumes that every exception to a natural law will automatically have a natural explanation. If one knows in advance that every event, however unusual, has a natural explanation, miracles are ruled out in advance. Mill's approach to human immortality overlooks strong evidence favoring its existence.

Inadequate View of Ethics. Utilitarianism also is inadequate. As a form of relativism, it is subject to the criticisms against relativists (*see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF). How can one know that everything is not absolute without an absolute standard by which to measure it? Further, to work properly, utilitarianism demands that finite creatures know what will bring the greatest good to the greatest number in the long run. We are seldom certain what will bring the greatest good even in the short run. Only an infinitely wise, good God could be a utilitarian. And Mill does not have such a God.

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Miracle. Before a materialist, naturalistic culture, Christians believe and are called upon to defend their belief that God created and governs the universe. One theme of Christian philosophy and apologetics is to understand and explain why biblical accounts of miracles should be believed, what miracles are and are not, how they relate to natural processes, and what they reveal to us about God. Because of the importance of this subject, miracles are covered under several headings relating to the nature of miracles in general, accounts in Scripture, and attacks on the possibility of miraculous interventions by God. What Christians regard as false or occultic

unexplained occurrences will be distinguished from genuine acts of God (*see* MIRACLES, FALSE).

Definition. A *miracle* is a special act of God that interrupts the natural course of events. The Christian conception of the miraculous immediately depends on the existence of a theistic God (*see* COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT ; MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD ; TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). If the theistic God exists, miracles are possible. If there is a God who can act, then there can be acts of God. The only way to show that miracles are impossible is to disprove the existence of God.

The above statement immediately calls for clarification: What are "special acts" of God? How are they known when they occur? There must be specific distinguishing characteristics of miracles before one can analyze events that possess these characteristics. Simply to say a miracle is a singularity is insufficient. Singularities occur in nature without obvious divine intervention.

Theists (*see* THEISM) define miracles in either a weak sense or a strong sense. Following Augustine, the weaker definition describes a miracle as "a portent [which] is not contrary to nature, but contrary to our knowledge of nature" (Augustine, 21.8).

Others, following Thomas Aquinas, define a miracle in the strong sense of an event that is outside nature's power, something only done through supernatural power. This latter, stronger sense is important to apologists. A miracle is a divine intervention, a supernatural exception to the regular course of the natural world. Atheist (*see* ATHEISM) Antony Flew put it well: "A miracle is something which would never have happened had nature, as it were, been left to its own devices" (Flew, 346). Natural laws describe naturally caused regularities; a miracle is a supernaturally caused singularity.

To expand on this definition, we need some understanding of what is meant by *natural law* . Broadly, a natural law is a general description of the usual orderly way in which the world operates. It follows, then, that a miracle is an unusual, irregular, specific way in which God acts within the world.

Probability of Miracles. Whether we can know if miracles actually happened depends on answers to three questions: (1) "are miracles possible?" (2) "are New Testament documents reliable?" (3) "were the New Testament witnesses reliable?"

An often overlooked argument is that for the probability of miracles. It is true that philosophy (i.e., arguments for God's existence) shows miracles are *possible* but only history reveals whether they are *actual*. But it is also true that, granting existence of a theistic God, miracles are *probable* .

A theistic God has the *ability* to perform miracles since he is all-powerful or *omnipotent* . Second, he has the *desire* to perform miracles because he is all-knowing or *omniscient* and all-good or *omnibenevolent* . One who examines history to see whether God *has* performed any miracles already can know that God is the kind of God who *would* if he could, and he *can* .

Why would God perform miracles if he could? By nature and will he is the kind of God who desires to communicate with his creatures and do good for them. And a miracle by definition is an event that does this very thing. Miracles heal, restore, bring back life, communicate God's will, vindicate his attributes, and many more things that are in accord with his nature. Such things befit the nature of the One performing them (the Creator and Redeemer) and the need of the one for whom they are performed (the creature). By analogy, what good earthly father who had the ability to rescue his drowning child would not do everything in his power to do so? And if he had all power, then we know in advance that his goodness would lead him to do so. How much more our heavenly Father? So we know in advance of looking at the evidence for the actuality of miracles that if God exists they are not only possible but probable.

Further, if a miracle is an act of God to confirm the word of God through a messenger of God (see MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF), then it is reasonable that God would want to do miracles. Through miracles, God confirms his prophets (Heb. 2:3–4). This is the way God confirmed Moses (Exod. 4) and Elijah (1 Kings 18). And this is the way he confirmed Jesus (John 3:2 ; Acts 2:22). How better could God confirm to us who were his spokespersons. And it is a priori probably that an intelligent, personal, moral Creator would want to communicate in the most effective way with his creatures.

Reality of Miracles. While philosophy makes supernatural events possible and the nature of a theistic God shows they are probable, only history reveals whether they are actual. But “history” here includes both the history of the cosmos and the history of the human race.

Actuality of the Miraculous in Cosmic History. A fact seldom fully appreciated is that even before we look at human history, we can know that miraculous events are not only possible but actual . The very cosmological argument, by which we know God exists, also proves that a supernatural event has occurred. For if the universe had a beginning and, therefore, a Beginner (see BIG BANG ; KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT), then God brought the universe into existence out of nothing (see CREATION, VIEWS OF). But ex nihilo creation out of nothing is the greatest supernatural event of all. If Jesus' making much bread out of a little bread is a miracle, then how much more is making everything out of nothing? Turning water into wine pales in comparison with creating the first water molecules. So, the surprising conclusion is that, if the Creator exists, then the miraculous is not only possible but actual. The history of the cosmos, then, reveals that the miraculous has occurred in making something out of nothing: making life out of nonlife; making the rational (mind) out of the nonrational (see EVOLUTION and related articles). What greater miracles could occur in human history than are already known to have occurred in cosmic history?

The Miraculous in Human History. Contrary to the widely perceived misconception, if God exists then we should come to human history with the expectation of the miraculous, not with a naturalistic bias against it. For, as we have seen, if the Creator exists, then miracles are not only possible and probable, but the miraculous has already occurred in cosmic history. God has already broken through supernaturally in the history of the cosmos and life leading up to human history. In view of this, the most reasonable expectation then, is to ask not *whether* but *where* he has broken through in human history.

The reality of miracles in human history is based on the reliability of the New Testament documents (see NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS) and the reliability of the New Testament witnesses (see NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ; NEW TESTAMENT, NON-CHRISTIAN SOURCES). For given the trustworthiness of their combined testimony, it is beyond reasonable dispute that the New Testament records numerous miraculous events.

Dimensions of Miracles. In the Bible's pattern, a miracle has several dimensions:

First, miracles have an *unusual character* . It is an out-of-the-ordinary event in contrast to the regular pattern of events in the natural world. As a “wonder” it attracts attention by its uniqueness. A burning bush that is not consumed, fire from heaven, and a person strolling on water are not normal occurrences. Hence, they draw the interest of observers.

Second, miracles have a *theological dimension* . A miracle is an act of God that presupposes a God who acts. The view that a God beyond the universe created it, controls it, and can interfere in it is *theism* .

Third, miracles have a *moral dimension* . They bring glory to God by manifesting his moral character. Miracles are visible acts that reflect the invisible nature of God. No true miracle, then, is evil, because God is good. Miracles by nature aim to produce and/or promote good.

Fourth, miracles have a *doctrinal dimension* . Miracles in the Bible are connected directly or indirectly with “truth claims” (see MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE). They are ways to tell a true prophet from a false prophet (Deut. 18:22). They confirm the truth of God through the servant of God (Heb. 2:3–4). Message and miracle go hand-in-hand.

Fifth, miracles have a *teleological dimension* . Unlike magic (see MIRACLES, MAGIC AND), they are never performed to entertain (see Luke 23:8). Miracles have the distinctive purpose to glorify the Creator and to provide evidence for people to believe by accrediting the message of God through the prophet of God.

Theistic Context for a Miracle. An essential feature of biblical miracles is their theistic context (see THEISM). Only within a theistic worldview can a miracle be identified. When Moses came upon the burning bush (Exod. 3:1–6), he began to investigate it because of its unusual nature. The accompanying word from God told Moses that this event was not merely unusual, but a miracle. If Moses reported to convinced atheists (see ATHEISM) what had happened at the burning bush, they would have been within their rights to doubt the story. In an atheistic universe it makes no sense to speak about acts of God. A burning bush and a voice would seem to the nontheist no more miraculous than the voice from heaven did to those who took it to be thunder (John 12:29). But granting that God exists and something about his rational and moral nature, these defining characteristics give miracles their apologetic power.

Conclusion. We must know what we are looking for before we can recognize a miracle. First, miracles stand in contrast to nature, which is God's regular and naturally predictable way of working in the world. Miracles are an unusual and humanly unpredictable way in which God sometimes intervenes in the events of the world. A miracle may look like any unusual

occurrence, but it has a supernatural cause. It is performed with divine power, according to the divine mind, for a divine purpose, in order to authenticate a divine message or purpose.

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Miracles, Alleged Impossibility of. See NATURALISM ; MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST ; SPINOZA, BENEDICT .

Miracles, Apologetic Value of. The central claims of Christianity are dependent on the apologetic value of miracles (see APOLOGETICS, ARGUMENT OF ; MIRACLE). If miracles have no evidential value, then there is no objective, historical evidence to support the claims of historic, orthodox Christianity.

Some contemporary naturalists argue that, no matter how unusual an event is, it cannot be identified as a miracle. If true, this has serious implications for those who believe in miracles. No unusual event that lays claim to divine origin could be considered a miracle. Further, theistic religions such as Judaism and Christianity, in which miraculous claims are used apologetically, could not actually identify any of their unusual events as miraculous confirmation of their truth claims, no matter how much evidence they could produce for the authenticity of these events.

Identifiability of Miracles. There are two aspects to the case for the identifiability of miracles. First, miracles in general must be identifiable before a particular miracle can be identified. Second, one must be able to point to distinguishing marks in order to identify a specific event as a miracle. The focus here will be on the identifiability of miracles.

According to some, miracles cannot be identified because the concept of a miracle is not coherent. Alistair McKinnon, for example, claims that "the idea of a suspension of natural law is self-contradictory. This follows from the meaning of the term" (Swinburne, 49). For if natural laws are descriptive, they merely inform us about the actual course of events. But nothing, says McKinnon, can violate the actual course of events. He wrote: "This contradiction may stand out

more clearly if for *natural law* we substitute the expression the *actual course of events* . Miracle would then be defined as 'an event involving the suspension of the actual course of events.' " Therefore, "someone who insisted upon describing an event as a miracle would be in a rather odd position of claiming that its occurrence was contrary to the actual course of events" (ibid., 50). McKinnon's argument can be summarized as follows:

1. Natural laws describe the actual course of events.
2. A miracle is a violation of a natural law.
3. But it is impossible to violate the actual course of events (what is, is; what happens, happens).
4. Therefore, miracles are impossible.

McKinnon's Argument. There are several problems with this argument. Three are particularly worth noting:

Begging the Question. If McKinnon is correct, miracles cannot be identified in the natural world, since whatever happens will not be a miracle. If whatever happens is *ipso facto* a natural event, then of course miracles never happen. This, however, simply begs the question; this definition of natural law is loaded against miracles. No matter what happens within the natural world, it will automatically be called a "natural event." This would eliminate in advance the possibility of any event in the world being a miracle. But this fails to recognize even the possibility that not every event *in* the world is *of* the world. For a miracle can be an effect *in* nature by a cause that is *beyond* nature. For the mind that makes a computer is *beyond* the computer, and yet the computer is *in* the world.

Misdefinition. The problem is that McKinnon has misdefined *natural laws* . Natural laws should not be defined as what *actually* happens but what *regularly* happens. As Richard Swinburne points out, "laws of nature do not just describe what happens. . . . They describe what happens in a regular and predictable way." Therefore, "when what happens is entirely irregular and unpredictable, its occurrence is not something describable by natural laws" (ibid., 78). In this way miracles can be identified as events within nature that fall into the class of the irregular and unpredictable. There may be more to a miracle than an irregular and unpredictable event in the natural world, but they are not less than this. At any rate they cannot be ruled out simply by defining a natural law as what actually occurs. Even though they occur in the natural world, miracles are distinguishable from natural occurrences.

Confusing Kinds of Events. Since natural laws deal with *regularities* and miracles with *singularities* , miracles cannot possibly be violations of natural laws. They are not even in the same class of events. A miracle is not a mini-natural law; it is a unique event with its own characteristics. Therefore, to claim that miracles don't happen (or should not be believed to have happened), because they do not fall into the class of natural events is a category mistake. By the same logic, we might as well say that no book has an intelligent cause because its origin cannot be explained by the operational laws of physics and chemistry.

Flew's Argument. A stronger attack on the apologetic value of miracles is laid out by Antony Flew. The basic objection to miracles by contemporary naturalists is not ontological but epistemological. That is, miracles are not rejected because we know they did not occur. Rather, we do not and cannot know that they *did* occur. Flew's objection fits into this category. If successful, Flew's argument shows that miracles have no apologetic value.

Miracles Are Parasitic to Nature. Flew broadly defines a miracle as something that "would never have happened had nature, as it were, been left to its own devices" (Flew, 346). He notes that Thomas Aquinas demonstrated that miracles are not properly a violation of natural law. Aquinas wrote that "it is not against the principle of craftsmanship . . . if a craftsman effects a change in his product, even after he has given it its first form" (Aquinas, 3.100). Not only is this *power* inherent in the idea of craftsmanship; so is the *mind* of the craftsman. A miracle bears the unmistakable mark of power and divine mind. A miracle, then, is "a striking interposition of divine power by which the operations of the ordinary course of nature are overruled, suspended, or modified" (see Flew, 346).

Accepting this theistic definition, Flew insists that "exceptions are logic dependent upon rules. Only insofar as it can be shown that there is an order does it begin to be possible to show that the order is occasionally overridden" (ibid., 347). In brief, miracles to Flew are logically parasitic to natural law. Hence, a strong view of miracles is possible without a strong view of the regularity of nature.

The Improbability of Miracles. Flew argues that miracles are *prima facie* improbable, quoting historian R. M. Grant that "credulity in antiquity varied inversely with the health of science and directly with the vigor of religion" (ibid.). David Strauss, a nineteenth-century Bible critic, was even more skeptical. He wrote, "We may summarily reject all miracles, prophecies, narratives of angels and demons, and the like, as simply impossible and irreconcilable with the known and universal laws which govern the course of events" (see ibid., 347). According to Flew, such skepticism is justified on a methodological basis.

Identifiability. Flew claims to be willing to allow in principle for the possibility of miracles. In practice, he argues that the problem of *identifying* a miracle is serious, if not insurmountable.

The argument against miracles from unidentifiability may be summarized:

1. A miracle must be identified (distinguished) before it can be known to have occurred.
2. A miracle can be distinguished in one of two ways: in terms of nature or in terms of the supernatural.
3. To identify it by reference to the supernatural as an act of God begs the question.
4. To identify it in reference to the natural event robs it of its supernatural quality.
5. Therefore, miracles cannot be known to have occurred, since there is no way to identify them.

Flew insists, against Augustine (see Augustine, 21.8), that if a miracle is merely "a portent [which] is not contrary to nature, but contrary to our knowledge of nature" (Flew, 348), then it has no real apologetic value. For, argues Flew, if an event is merely a miracle in relation *to us at present*, then it provides no proof that a revelation it alleges to support is *really* beyond the power of nature. Whereas Augustine's notion of a miracle would assure the dependence of creation on God, it does so at the cost of subverting the apologetic value of miracle (ibid.). For if a miracle is only contrary to our *knowledge* of nature, then a miracle is nothing but a natural event. In any event, we could not know that a miracle has *really* occurred, only that it *seems* to us that one did.

Flew's point can be stated another way. In order to identify a miracle within nature, the identification of that miracle must be in terms of what is independent of nature. But there is no way to identify a miracle as independent of the natural except by appealing to a supernatural realm, which begs the question. It argues in effect: "I know this is a miraculous event in the natural world, because I know (on some independent basis) that there is a supernatural cause beyond the natural world."

On the other hand, there is no natural way to identify a miracle. For unless it is already known (on independent grounds) that the event is miraculous, then it must be considered to be another natural event. From the scientific point of view, it is just "odd" or inconsistent with previously known events. Such an event should occasion *research* for a broader scientific law, not worship.

From this, it would follow that no alleged miraculous event can be used to prove that a religious system is true. That is to say, miracles can have no apologetic value. We cannot argue that God exists because an event is an act of God. For unless we know that there is a God who can act, we cannot know that an occurrence is an act of God. The latter cannot prove the former (ibid., 348–49).

If miracles are not identifiable, because there is no way to define them without begging the question, the reasoning proceeds:

1. A miracle must be identifiable before it can be identified.
2. A miracle is identified in only one of two ways—either as an unusual event in nature, or as an exception to nature.
3. But an unusual event in nature is simply a natural event, not a miracle.
4. An exception to nature cannot be known (i.e., identified) from within nature alone.
5. Therefore, a miracle is not identifiable.

And, of course, what is not identifiable has no evidential value. It cannot be used to prove the truth of Christianity.

Response to Flew's Argument. Flew's first premise is solid. We must know what we are looking for before we can know we have found it. If we cannot define it, then we cannot be sure we have discovered it. But if we can define an event in terms of nature, miracles can be reduced to natural events. However, to define them in terms of a supernatural cause (God) is to presuppose that God exists. Therefore, miracles cannot be used as an evidence of God's existence. The supernaturalist argues in a circle.

Presupposing God's Existence. One way to reply to Flew is to claim that arguing in a circle is not unique to supernaturalists. Naturalists do the same thing. Antisupernaturalist arguments presuppose naturalism. Thus, it is necessary to argue in a circle, because all reason is circular (Van Til, 118). In the final analysis, all thought is grounded in faith (*see* FAITH AND REASON ; FIDEISM).

If a supernaturalist chooses to go this route, the grounds (or lack of grounds) are just as good as those of the antisupernaturalist. Certainly naturalists who rule out miracles on the basis of a faith commitment to naturalism are in no position to forbid theists from simply believing that God exists and, hence, that miracles are possible and identifiable. Once the naturalists accept the privilege of a mere belief basis for naturalism, for which they have no rational or scientific proof, they must allow alternative worldviews the same opportunity.

Evidence for God's Existence. There is, however, another avenue: Theists may first offer rational justification for belief in God through the cosmological or teleological arguments. If successful, then they can have earned the right to define (show the identifiability of) miracles in terms of the supernatural realm they have *reason* to think exists. To the degree that one can give a rational argument for God's existence, it is not difficult to circumvent Flew's criticism that miracles have no identifiable apologetic value.

Miracles as Confirmation of Truth. Christian apologetics is based in miracles. Unless miracles are possible (*see* THEISM) and actual (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ; MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE), there is no way to verify the truth claims of Christianity. This raises the question of the relationship between a miracle and a truth claim. Are miracles an appropriate and valuable confirmation of Christianity's truth claims?

The claim of David Hume (1711–1776) that all religious truth claims are self-canceling fails because the credibility of all alleged “miracles” is not equal. However, the question remains as to whether a miracle can confirm truth.

In both New and Old Testament contexts, people did not show naïve acceptance of every alleged word or act from God. Like moderns, they wanted proof. Miracles were assumed to confirm the message of a spokesman for God.

Miracles Confirmed the Prophetic Claim. When asked by God to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses replied:

“What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, ‘The LORD did not appear to you’?” Then the LORD said to him, What is that in your hand? A staff, he replied. The

LORD said, “Throw it on the ground. Moses threw it on the ground and it became a snake, and he ran from it. Then the LORD said to him, Reach out your hand and take it by the tail. So Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. This, said the LORD , is so that they may believe that the LORD , the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you. ’” [Exod. 4:1–5 , emphasis added]

It is clear that the miracles were intended to confirm the message God had given him. God, in fact, offered multiple miracles. For, “If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first miraculous sign, they may believe the second. But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground” (Exod. 4:8–9).

Later, when Moses was challenged by Korah, a miracle again was Moses' vindication.

Then [Moses] said to Korah and all his followers: “In the morning the LORD will show who belongs to him and who is holy, and he will have that person come near him. The man he chooses he will cause to come near him.” . . . Then Moses said, “This is how you will know that the LORD has sent me to do all these things and that it was not my idea: If these men die a natural death and experience only what usually happens to men, then the LORD has not sent me. But if the LORD brings about something totally new, and the earth opens its mouth and swallows them, with everything that belongs to them, and they go down alive into the grave, then you will know that these men have treated the LORD with contempt.” . . . They went down alive into the grave, with everything they owned; the earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community. [Num. 16:5 , 28–30 , 33]

Few questioned Moses' divine authority from this point.

When confronted by belief in pagan deities, Elijah the prophet of Israel, challenged the people of Israel: “ ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing” (1 Kings 18:21). To prove he was a prophet of the true God, *Yahweh* , Elijah proposed a contest in which they would invoke a supernatural confirmation. When the prophets of Baal could not bring down fire on their sacrifice from heaven, Elijah had the altar to *Yahweh* drenched with water and prayed: “O LORD , God of Abra ham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command” (1 Kings 18:36). The text adds, “Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.” And “When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, ‘The LORD —he is God! The LORD —he is God!’ ” (1 Kings 18:38–39).

Miracles Confirmed the Messianic Claim. Jesus' ministry was characterized by supernatural, confirming signs of his identity as a prophet and more. But the Gospel of Matthew records that some Pharisees and teachers of the law still demanded a confirming sign: “Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.” Jesus refused on this day, not because miracles did not constitute a sign of his identity, but because the question was asked in contempt and unbelief.

Instead, Jesus announced that soon they would have the greatest confirming sign of all: “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matt. 12:38–39). Just as Jonah was in the fish’s belly three days, so Jesus was in the grave and then returned to life. He offered the miraculous sign of his resurrection as proof that he was the Jewish Messiah.

John sent messengers to ask Jesus whether he was the Messiah. “At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, ‘Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor’ ” (Luke 7:20–22). These were just the sorts of miracles the prophets had predicted would confirm the presence of Israel’s Messiah. The answer was clear: Jesus’ miracles confirmed his messages.

Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council, the Sanhedrin, told Jesus, “ ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him’ ” (John 3:1–2).

In his great sermon on Pentecost, Peter told the crowd that Jesus had been “accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him” (Acts 2:22).

Miracles Confirmed the Apostolic Claim. Hebrews 2:3–4 proclaims that God has testified to his “great salvation” in the gospel “by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” (Heb. 2:3–4). Miracles were used to confirm the apostolic message. They were the supernatural sign for their sermon; the divine confirmation for their revelation.

In defense of his apostleship at Corinth, Paul wrote: “The things that mark an apostle—signs, wonders and miracles—were done among you with great perseverance” (2 Cor. 12:12). This special apostolic, miracle-working power was offered as proof of the truth he spoke to them.

Qur’an and Confirming Miracles. Judaism and Christianity are not the only religions that recognize the validity of miracles as a means of confirming a message from God. Islam does as well (see MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED MIRACLES OF). Muhammad recognized that prophets before him (including Jesus) were confirmed by miraculous powers. “If they reject thee, So were rejected apostles Before thee, who came With Clear Signs” (sura 3:184).

The *Qur’an* records Moses saying of his miracles, “Thou knowest Well that these things Have been sent down by none But the Lord of the heavens And the earth as eye-opening Evidence” (17:102). Allah says, “Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron, with Our signs and Authority manifest” (23:45). So, in principle, all three great monotheistic religions agree that a truth claim can be substantiated by miracles.

Unbelievers and Confirming Miracles. Even many who reject miracles agree that unique miracles could be used to support the truth claims of the religion possessing them. Even Hume

implied that truly unique miracles would confirm the truth claims of a religion. He argued only that similar signs by conflicting religions would be self-canceling. He claimed only that “every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles) . . . so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system” and “in destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles on which that system was established.” Since a miracle’s “direct scope is to establish the particular system to which it is attributed, so has it the same force . . . to overthrow every other system.” This leaves open the possibility that a religion presenting unique miraculous confirmation would be true and all opposing claims false.

Agnostic (see AGNOSTICISM) Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) admitted miracles would confirm a truth claim. In response to the question “What kind of evidence could convince you God exists?” Russell said,

I think that if I heard a voice from the sky predicting all that was going to happen to me during the next twenty-four hours, including events that would have seemed highly improbable, and if all these events then proceed to happen, then I might perhaps be convinced at least of the existence of some superhuman intelligence. I can imagine other evidence of the same sort which might convince me, but as far as I know, no such evidence exists. [“What Is an Agnostic?”] To the contrary, such evidence does not exist (see CHRIST, DEITY OF ; PROPHECY AS PROOF OF THE BIBLE).

Logical Confirmation of Miracles. The logic behind a miracle being used to confirm a religious truth claim goes like this:

1. If a theistic God exists, then miracles are possible.
2. A miracle is a special act of God.
3. God is the source and standard of all truth; he cannot err.
4. Nor would a theistic God act to confirm something as true that was false.
5. Therefore, true miracles in connection with a message confirm that message to be from God: (a) The miracle confirms the message. (b) The sign confirms the sermon. (c) An act of God confirms the Word of God. (d) New revelation needs new confirmation.

If there is an all-powerful, all-good, and all-wise God, then it follows that he would not perform a miraculous act to confirm a lie. Since miracles are by nature special acts of God, God would not act contrary to his own nature. The God of all truth would not miraculously confirm error. Hence, when a truth claim is repeatedly confirmed by miracles, such as the Old Testament prophets, Jesus, and the New Testament apostles did, then it is true and all opposing views are false.

Criteria for Confirmation. Several criteria can be established, on the basis of principles discussed above, for allowing miracles as a confirmation of a truth claim. These are criteria for

apologetically valuable miracles. They all assume miracles to be possible. Confirming miracles should be:

Connected with a Truth Claim

Truly Supernatural

Unique

Multiple

Predictive

Connected with a Truth Claim. Not all supernatural events are connected with truth claims. There was no truth claim announced of which the acts of creation are evidence. Neither was there a lesson taught by the translation of Enoch to heaven (Genesis 5), the plagues on the king who took Abraham's wife (Genesis 12), the manna from heaven (Exodus 16), Samson's supernatural feats (Judges 14–16), or the resurrection of the man who touched Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13). Most miracles are connected with a person who is thereby shown to be a prophet of God. But these acts lack direct apologetic value without the specific claim of prophethood and a message from God.

Truly Supernatural. A miracle is truly supernatural, as opposed to an anomaly, magic (*see* MIRACLES, MAGIC AND), a psychosomatic cure (*see* HEALING, PSYCHOSOMATIC), or even a special act of providence. None of these involve true supernatural intervention. All can be explained by natural means, even if they are at times very unusual and though they are used by God. One characteristic of a supernatural event is that it is immediate, rather than gradual. It is an irregular and naturally unrepeatable event. It is successful every time it is attempted by God or a person he empowers.

Unique. Hume argued that an alleged supernatural event cannot support one religious claim as long as a contradictory claim is made by another who can perform the same kind of alleged miracles. Similar competing miracles are self-canceling. Logically, from a theistic standpoint, it is impossible for true miracles to confirm contradictory claims, since a true miracle is an act of God, who cannot confirm what amounts to a lie (Heb. 6:18 ; cf. Titus 1:2).

Multiple. As Deuteronomy 17:6 put it, "In the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word shall be established." Multiple witnesses are better than one. In fact, in crucial life-and-death legal matters multiple testimony is often mandatory. One miracle leaves room for doubt. Hence, apologetically relevant miracles should be multiple.

Predictive. Another characteristic often connected with a confirming miracle is that it is often predicted. While this is not essential, it is helpful. It eliminates charges that the miraculous event is not connected with the truth claim. Otherwise, it might be viewed as a fluke. For example, if a false teacher was teaching along the shores of the Sea of Galilee as Jesus walked by on the water, Jesus' walking should not have been taken as a confirmation of the false teacher's views.

On many occasions in the Bible, Jesus and other prophets predicted and performed miracles that confirmed their claims. Jesus predicted his resurrection from early in his ministry on (Matt. 12:40 ; 17:22–23 ; 20:18–19 ; John 2:19–22). He explicitly predicted the resurrection as a "sign" (miracle) of his claims (Matt. 12:39–40). Once Jesus emphatically said ahead of time that a miracle would be evidence of his claim to be the Messiah: " 'But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,' he said to the paralytic, 'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home' " (Mark 2:10–11).

In the Old Testament miracles were often announced in advance. Elijah predicted the fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice (1 Kings 18:22f). Moses promised supernatural judgments of God on Egypt (Exod. 4:21–23). Moses announced that the rod would bud (Num. 17:5) and that the rebellious Korah would be judged (Num. 16:28–30).

Conclusion. Even Flew would not claim that his argument eliminates the possibility of miracles. He does believe it seriously cripples Christian apologetics (*see* CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS ; HISTORICAL APOLOGETICS). If miracles cannot be identified as supernatural events, they have no real apologetic value. A merely unusual event within nature can prove nothing beyond nature. However, Christian apologists can evade this problem by either presupposing the existence of God or by offering evidence independent of miracles for his existence. For as long as there is a God who can act, then special acts of God (miracles) are possible and identifiable. The only way to disprove this possibility is to disprove the possibility of God's existence. But such attempts are notoriously unsuccessful and self-refuting (*see* GOD, ALLEGED DISPROOFS OF).

Not only can miracles confirm a truth claim, but biblical miracles (*see* MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE) fit all the criteria for such apologetically valuable miracles. As shown elsewhere, no other religion or claimants to truth contradictory to Christianity have offered verified examples of truly supernatural events (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF). We can conclude that biblical miracles, and they alone, support the truth claims of Christ and the biblical prophets. Christianity alone is a supernaturally confirmed religion (*see* WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY).

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Miracles, Arguments Against. Most modern thinkers who reject miracles trace their reasoning to the Scottish skeptic (*see* AGNOSTICISM), David Hume (1711–1776). Hume provided what many believe to be the most formidable of all challenges to a supernaturalist perspective: Miracles are incredible.

Hume laid out three arguments against miracles: philosophical, historical, and religious. The first argument is an argument *in principle*, based on the incredibility of claiming natural laws are ever contravened. The second is an argument *in practice*, which challenges whether miracles have ever had credible witnesses (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF). The last is from the self-canceling nature of similar miracle claims that abound in all religions.

The Incredibility of Miracles. Building on his empirical epistemology, Hume launched his attack on miracles with the comment, “I flatter myself that I have discovered an argument . . . which, if just, will, with the wise and learned, be an everlasting check to all kinds of superstitious delusion, and consequently will be useful as long as the world endures” (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 10.1.18). Hume’s reasoning goes like this (Inquiry, 10.1.18, 120–23):

1. A wise person proportions belief to the evidence.
2. An event that can be established on infallible experience can be, with full assurance, expected to reoccur in the future.
3. The reliability of evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony establishes proof or probability, as it is corroborated by other reports and evidence.
4. All circumstances should be considered in judging probability, and the ultimate standard is how the reports comport with personal experience and observation.
5. Where personal experience is not the same, the person should keep a contrary judgment and subject the question to thorough argument.
6. Any contradictions among witnesses should be regarded with suspicion. Suspicion should also arise if the witnesses are few in number, of “doubtful character,” have a vested interest in what they affirm, hesitate in their testimony, or assert it too vigorously.

7. “But when the fact attested is such a one as has seldom fallen under our observation, here is a contest of two opposite experiences; of which the one destroys the other as far as its force goes, and the superior can only operate on the mind by the force which remains.”

8. A miracle violates the laws of nature, which have, by “firm and unalterable experience” been established.

9. Therefore, “the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.”

10. Experience is direct and full proof against the existence of any miracle.

Hume’s argument can be abbreviated:

1. A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.
2. Firm and unalterable experience has established these laws of nature.
3. A wise person proportions belief to evidence.
4. Therefore, the proof against miracles is overwhelming.

Hume wrote, “There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous event. Otherwise the event would not merit that appellation.” So “nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happened in the common course of nature” (10.1.122–23).

Alternatives in Hume’s Argument. There are two basic ways to understand Hume’s argument against miracles. We will call these the “hard” and “soft” interpretations. According to the “hard” interpretation, Hume would be saying:

1. Miracles, by definition, violate natural laws.
2. Natural laws are unalterably uniform.
3. Therefore, miracles cannot occur.

Now, despite the fact that Hume’s argument sometimes sounds like this, it is not necessarily what he has in mind. If this is his argument, then it clearly begs the question by simply defining miracles as impossible. For if miracles are a “violation” of what cannot be “altered,” then miracles are *ipso facto* impossible. Supernaturalists could easily avoid this dilemma. They could refuse to define miracles as “violations” of fixed law and simply call them “exceptions” to a general rule. Both premises are deniable. Natural law is the regular (normal) pattern of events. It is not a universal or unalterable pattern.

This would be an easy way out of the problem. Actually, Hume's position contains an argument that is much more difficult to answer, one that addresses a "softer" view of natural law. It is not an argument for the *impossibility* of miracles, but for their *incredibility* :

1. A miracle is by definition a rare occurrence.
2. Natural law is by definition a description of regular occurrence.
3. The evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare.
4. Wise individuals always base belief on the greater evidence.
5. Therefore, wise individuals should never believe in miracles.

Notice that this "soft" form of the argument does not rule miracles out of the question; they are held to be incredible by the nature of the evidence. Wise people do not claim that miracles cannot occur; they simply *never believe* they happen. Sufficient evidence never exists for belief.

In this "soft" interpretation of the argument, miracles are still eliminated, since by the *very nature of the case* no thoughtful person should ever hold that a miracle has indeed occurred. If this is so, Hume has seemingly avoided begging the question and yet has successfully eliminated the possibility of reasonable belief in miracles. Variations of these arguments are still held to be valid by some widely respected contemporary philosophers.

Evaluation of Hume's Argument. Since the "hard" form of Hume's argument clearly begs the question and is easily answered by redefining the terms, we will concentrate on the "soft" form. The key to unlocking this attack rests in Hume's claim for uniform experience.

Hume's "uniform" experience either begs the question or is special pleading. It begs the question if Hume presumes to know the experience is uniform *in advance* of the evidence. How can one know that all *possible* experience will confirm naturalism, without access to all possible experiences, past, present, and future? If, on the other hand, Hume simply means by "uniform" experience the select experiences of *some* persons (who have not encountered a miracle), this is special pleading. Others claim to have experienced miracles. As Stanley Jaki observes, "Insofar as he was a sensationist or empiricist philosopher he had to grant equal credibility to the recognition of any fact, usual or unusual" (Jaki, 23). As C. S. Lewis observed,

Now of course we must agree with Hume that if there is absolutely "uniform experience" against miracles, if in other words they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle. [Lewis, 105]

The only alternative to this circular argument is to be open to the possibility that miracles have occurred.

Further, Hume does not really *weigh* evidence objectively; he really *adds* up the evidence against miracles. Death occurs over and over; resurrection occurs rarely. Therefore we must reject the latter. In Hume's own words, "It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden, because such a kind of death has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country." Hence, "it is more probable that all men must die" (*Enquiry*, 10.1.122).

There are other problems with Hume's concept of adding up events to determine truth. Even if a few resurrections *actually occurred*, according to Hume's principles, one should not believe them. However, truth is not determined by majority vote. Hume commits a kind of *consensus gentium* which is an informal logical fallacy of arguing that something is true because it is believed by most people.

This argument really equates "evidence" and "probability." It says in effect that one should always believe what is most probable, what has the highest "odds." One should not, therefore, believe that the rolled dice came up with three 6's on the first roll. The odds against that happening, after all, are 216 to 1. Or, one should not believe that he was dealt a perfect bridge hand (which has happened) since the odds against this happening are 1,635,013,559,600 to 1! Hume overlooks that wise people base beliefs on *facts*, not odds. Sometimes the "odds" against an event are high (based on past observation of similar events), but the evidence for the event is very good (based on current observation or testimony for this event).

Hume's concept of "adding" evidence eliminates belief in any sort of unusual or unique event. Richard Whately satirized Hume's thesis in his pamphlet, *Historical Doubts Concerning the Existence of Napoleon Bonaparte*. Since Napoleon's exploits were so fantastic, so extraordinary, so unprecedented, no intelligent person should believe that these events ever happened. After recounting Napoleon's amazing and unparalleled military feats, Whately wrote, "Does anyone believe all this and yet refuse to believe a miracle? Or rather, what is this but a miracle? Is not this a violation of the laws of nature?" If the skeptic does not deny the existence of Napoleon, he "must at least acknowledge that they do not apply to that question the same plan of reasoning which they have made use of in others" (Whately, 274, 290).

Finally, Hume's argument proves too much. It proves that a person should not believe in a miracle *even if it happens!* For it argues, not that miracles have not occurred, but that we should not *believe* they occurred because the evidence for the regular is always greater than that for the rare. On this logic, if a miracle did occur—rare as it may be—one should still not believe in it. There is something patently absurd about claiming that an event should be disbelieved, even if one knows it happened.

Uniformitarian Denial of Miracles. Can one eliminate belief in present events based on evidence for past events? It would seem that Hume wants each wise person always to believe in advance that miracles never have, do not now, nor ever will occur. Before examining the evidence, one should be prearmed with the uniform and "unalterable" testimony of uniformitarianism. Only if one approaches the world with a kind of invincible bias against anything that has not been personally perceived in the past can all claims for the miraculous be discounted.

Hume recognized the fallacy of this reasoning when he argued that, based on past conformity, nothing can be known as true concerning the future. We cannot even know for sure that the sun will rise tomorrow morning (*An Abstract of Treatise on Human Nature*, 14–16). Hence, for Hume to deny future miracles based on past experience is inconsistent with his own principles and is a violation of his own system.

If it were true that no present exception can overthrow “laws” based on our uniform experience in the past, there could be no progress in our scientific understanding of the world. For established or repeatable exceptions to past patterns are precisely what force a change in scientific belief. When an observed exception to a past “law” is established, that “law” is revised, if possible, to account for the exception. A new “law” replaces it. This is precisely what happened when certain outer-spatial but repeatable “exceptions” to Newton’s law of gravitation were found, and Einstein’s theory of relativity was considered broader and more adequate. Exceptions to “laws” have a heuristic (discovery) value; they are goads to progress in our understanding of the universe. Now what is true of repeatable exceptions that call for a natural explanation is also true for unrepeatable exceptions that point to a supernatural explanation.

Lack of Credible Witnesses. Hume also argued against the testimony for miracles in practice. We have shown that the *a priori* attempts to eliminate miracles fail, so we are left with *a posteriori* arguments. Hume objects that there is not enough evidence to establish New Testament miracles. He enumerates several arguments which, if true, would exclude the credibility of the New Testament witnesses.

Hume says, “there is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men of such unquestioned good-sense, education, and learning as to secure us against all delusion in themselves.” Nor are there enough witnesses of “such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others.” Neither are they “of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in case of their being detected in any falsehood.” Finally, neither have the alleged miracles been “performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world as to render the detection unavoidable” (*Abstract of a Treatise* , 124).

“The strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and marvelous . . . ought reasonably to beget suspicion against all relations of this kind.” And “if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end of common sense,” wrote Hume (ibid., 125–26).

Miracles and the Ignorant. Hume believes the case for miracles is damaged because “they are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations.” Those that have found believers in civilized countries, he added, usually got them originally from “ignorant and barbarous ancestors.” Further, “the advantages are so great of startling an imposture among ignorant people that . . . it has a much better chance for succeeding in remote countries than if the first scene had been laid in a city renowned for arts and knowledge” (ibid., 126–28).

“Upon the whole, then, it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof.” Further, “even supposing it amounted to a

proof, it would be opposed by another proof derived from the very nature of the fact which it would endeavor to establish” (ibid., 137).

Evaluation. Even though Hume implies that he is open to actual evidence for a miracle should it meet his standards for purity, one quickly suspects that the rules of evidence have been tampered with, so as to rule out the credibility claims for any miracle.

Hume at one point candidly admits that no number of witnesses would convince him of a miracle. Speaking of what he acknowledged to be highly attested Jansenist miracles of his day, Hume wrote: “And what have we to oppose to such a cloud of witnesses but the *absolute impossibility* or miraculous nature of the events which they relate?” Such impossibility, he adds, should be sufficient “in the eyes of all reasonable people” (ibid., 133, emphasis added). No matter how many witnesses one provides for these “absolutely impossible” events, no “reasonable person” will believe them. If this is the case, then Hume is still approaching every miraculous event, no matter how well it is attested, from an incurably *a priori* naturalistic bias. All the talk of testing the credibility of the witnesses is poorly concealed antisupernaturalism.

This bias shows that his argument cuts in two directions. Knowledge of human nature also reveals biases against accepting miracles.

Hume’s position also is inconsistent. He would not allow testimony for miracles, yet he would allow testimony from those who had seen frozen water, in preference to the testimony of those who never had. But why allow testimony for one event and not the other? He cannot reply that it is because others have seen water frozen, for this begs the question. The problem is that a tropical tribe has never seen it, so why should they accept the testimony of an outsider who says he has, regardless of how often he has seen it? Miracles have happened more than once. Further, according to Hume’s own principles, even if one saw water freeze only once and he walked or slid on it, that would be sufficient to know that it happened. But, the same applies to a miracle. Only an antisupernatural bias would hinder a person from honestly considering reliable testimony about its occurrence.

Hume is apparently unaware of the strong historical evidence for the reliability of the biblical documents and witnesses (*see BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR ; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF*). At least, he overlooks it. But biblical miracles cannot be dismissed without a closer look. For no one should rule out the possibility of these miracles in advance of looking at the evidence for them.

New Testament Witnesses and Hume’s Criteria. Hume outlined the basic criteria that he believed necessary for testing the credibility of witnesses (ibid., 120). These are discussed in the article WITNESSES, HUME’S CRITERIA FOR . They can be summarized as four questions:

1. Do the witnesses contradict each other?
2. Are there a sufficient number of witnesses?
3. Were the witnesses truthful?

4. Were they prejudiced?

Witnesses do not contradict each other. Hundreds of alleged contradictions in the Gospels have been weighed and found wanting by scholars, including Gleason Archer, John Haley, William Arndt, and others (see some of these defenses in the list of sources for this article). The error is not in the Gospel but in the procedure used by the critic. For a study of sample charges, see BIBLE, ALLEGED ERRORS IN . The testimonies of the New Testament witnesses are never mutually contradictory (see BIBLE, ALLEGED ERRORS). Each one tells a crucial and overlapping part of the whole story.

To be sure, there are minor discrepancies. One account (Matt. 28:2–5) says there was one angel at the tomb on the morning of Jesus' resurrection; John says there were two angels (John 20:12). It should be noted about these kinds of discrepancies that they are conflicts but not irreconcilable contradictions. Matthew does not say there was *only* one angel there; that would be a contradiction. Likely at one point there was one angel, and at another a second angel was about. Conflict in details is what one would expect from authentic, independent witnesses. Any perceptive judge who heard several witnesses give identical testimony would suspect collusion (see GOSPELS, HISTORICITY OF).

The number of witnesses is sufficient. Twenty-seven books in the New Testament were written by some nine persons, all eyewitnesses or contemporaries of the events they recorded. Six of these books are crucial to the truth of New Testament miracles, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, and 1 Corinthians. All of these books bear witness to the miracle of the resurrection. Even critical scholars now acknowledge that these books are first-century documents, most written before A.D. 70, while contemporaries of Christ were still alive. Virtually all scholars acknowledge that 1 Corinthians was written by the apostle Paul around A.D. 55 or 56, a little over two decades after the death of Christ. This is a powerful witness to the reality of the miracle of the resurrection: First, it is a very early document. Second, it is written by an eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (15:8, cf. Acts 9:3–8). Third, it refers to more than 500 eyewitnesses of the resurrection (15:6), stressing that most of these witnesses were still alive (vs. 6). Any immediate reader of 1 Corinthians could check out the reliability of the evidence for the resurrection.

The witnesses were truthful. Few challenge the fact that the New Testament provides a great standard of morality based on love (Matt. 22:36–37) and inner piety (Matthew 5–7). Jesus' apostles repeated this teaching in their writings (for example, Romans 13 ; 1 Corinthians 13 ; Galatians 5). Their lives exemplified their moral teaching. Most died for what they believed (2 Tim. 4:6–8 ; 2 Peter 1:14), an unmistakable sign of their sincerity.

In addition to teaching that truth is a divine imperative (Eph. 4:15 , 25), it is evident that the New Testament writers were scrupulous about expressing it. Peter declared, "We did not follow cunningly devised fables" (2 Peter 1:16). The Apostle Paul insisted, "Do not lie one to another" (Col. 3:9).

Where the New Testament writers' statements overlap with the discoveries of historians and archaeologists, they have proven to be exactly accurate (see ARCHAEOLOGY, NEW

TESTAMENT). Archaeologist Nelson Glueck concludes, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible" (31). Millar Burrows notes that "more than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine" (Burrows, 1). There is no hint that the New Testament writers ever falsified facts of the case. Their testimony would be accepted as valid by any unbiased jury. As the great Harvard legal expert Simon Greenleaf concluded, their testimony shows absolutely no sign of perjury.

The witnesses were not prejudiced. There is every reason to believe that New Testament witnesses of the miracles of Christ, particularly of his resurrection, were not predisposed to believe the events to which they gave testimony. The apostles themselves did not believe the when the women reported it (Luke 24:11). Even some disciples who saw Christ were "slow of heart to believe" (Luke 24:25). Indeed, when Jesus appeared to ten apostles and showed them his crucifixion scars, "they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement" (Luke 24:41). And even after they were convinced by Jesus' eating food, their absent colleague Thomas protested that he would not believe unless he could put his finger in the scars in Jesus' hands and side (John 20:25).

Jesus also appeared to unbelievers, in particular his skeptical half-brother, James (John 7:5 ; 1 Cor. 15:7), and to a Jewish Pharisee named Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9). If Jesus had only appeared to those who were believers or had a propensity to believe, there might be legitimacy to the charge that the witnesses were prejudiced. But the opposite is the case.

Witnesses to the resurrection had nothing to gain personally by their witness to the resurrection. They were persecuted and threatened (cf. Acts 4 , 5 , 8). Most of the apostles were martyred. Yet they proclaimed and defended it in the face of death. Nor should witnesses be dismissed simply because they have an interest in what occurred. Otherwise, we should not accept testimony from the survivors of the holocaust, which we do. The question is whether there is evidence they were telling the truth.

Self-Canceling Claims. Hume claims that "every miracle, therefore, pretended to have been wrought in any of these religions (and all of them abound in miracles) . . . so has it the same force, though more indirectly, to overthrow every other system." However, Hume believes, these miracles do not accomplish their task. Rather, "in destroying a rival system, it likewise destroys the credit of those miracles on which that system was established" (Hume, 129–30). Since all religions have the same sorts of miracles, none of them establish the truth of their doctrines. They cancel one another out as witnesses to truth.

There are, however, several significant problems with Hume's argument from the self-canceling nature of miracle claims.

All Miracles Claims Are the Same? Hume wrongly assumes that all alleged miracles are created equal. This is contrary to fact. Some obviously refer to natural anomalies or psychosomatic cures. Particularly in the Eastern and New Age religions, supernatural occurrences generally can be shown to be tricks (see MIRACLES, MAGIC AND). In the case of

prophecies, their accuracy is too low to be taken seriously. There is a big difference between walking on hot coals, a feat that anyone can be taught to do, and walking on water, as Jesus did (John 6). There is a difference between healing someone of migraine headaches and healing a person born blind, as Jesus did (John 9). Faith-healers in all religions raise up the sick, but Jesus raised the dead (John 11).

All Witnesses Are Equally Reliable? Hume's reasoning assumes that the credibility of the witnesses for the miracle claims in all religions is the same. The New Testament miracles are attested by contemporary eyewitnesses. Islamic miracle stories appear generations later (see MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED MIRACLES OF). Some have credible witnesses; others do not. The reliability of each witness to a miracle must be evaluated on its own merits. They are decidedly not equal.

Evaluation. Rather than disproving New Testament miracles, Hume's third argument that all religion's miracle stories are equally (un)reliable, supports the authenticity of biblical miracles. For the superiority of the Christian witnesses is a sound argument against all non-Christian miracle claims. We may restate the argument this way:

1. All non-Christian religions (which claim miracles) are supported by similar "miracle" claims (in both their nature and witnesses).
2. But no such "miracles" have strong enough testimony to maintain evidential value, so they are self-canceling.
3. Therefore, no non-Christian religion is supported by miracles.

If this is so, then we can argue that only Christianity is divinely confirmed as true.

1. Only Christianity has unique miracle claims confirmed by sufficient testimony.
2. What has unique miraculous confirmation of its claims is true (as opposed to contrary views).
3. Therefore, Christianity is true (as opposed to contrary views).

Jesus' miracles were instantaneous, always successful, and unique. So-called miracle workers who claim partial success effect only psychosomatic cures, engage in trickery, perform satanic signs, or other naturally explainable events. No contemporary healer even claims to heal all diseases (including "incurable" ones) instantaneously, with 100 percent success. Jesus and his apostles did. This is unique, and it sets these miracles against all competing claims by other religions. If biblical miracles are unique, then they alone confirm the truth-claims connected with them (Exod. 4:1f .; 1 Kings 18:1f .; John 3:2 ; Acts 2:22 ; 14:3 ; Heb. 2:3-4). All other so-called miracles are, as Hume's argument shows, self-canceling.

Arguments from Analogy. Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) laid down the rule of analogy: The only way one can know the past is by analogy in the present. That is, the unknown of the past is

arrived at only through the known in the present. On the basis of this, some argue that, since no miracles occur in the present such as are alleged to exist in the past, it follows that proper historical method eliminates the miraculous.

Troeltsch used "the principle of analogy" and Antony Flew a similar principle of "critical history" against miracles. These theories are extensively examined in the article TROELTSCH, ERNST , so they will be covered only in general terms here.

Troeltsch's "Principle of Analogy." This principle of analogy, according to Troeltsch, asserts that "Without uniformity in the present, we cannot know anything from the past" (*Historicism and Its Problems*). On the basis of this principle, Troeltsch and others have insisted that no evidence or witnesses are adequate to establish miracles (Becker, 12-13).

This argument does not insist that no such miracles as are reported in the Bible occurred. The claim, rather, is that they are historically unknowable, whether they occurred or not. Most would agree that no such miracles as a virgin birth, walking on water, or raising the dead are occurring today, so by Troeltsch's analogy, such events cannot be known to have happened ever.

Flew's "Critical History." Similar is Antony Flew 's "critical history." Flew asserts that the remains of the past cannot be interpreted as historical evidence unless we presume that the same basic regularities obtained then as do today. The historian must judge the past evidence by personal knowledge of what is probable or possible (350).

Flew concluded that the critical historian dismisses stories of a miracle out of hand, ranking them with the impossible and absurd (ibid., 352). The impossibility, Flew adds, is not logical but physical. Miracles are possible in principle, but in practice they break natural laws that are simply never broken.

Evaluation of the Historical Argument. Troeltsch and Flew attempt to rule out *knowability* by what Flew calls "critical history." Further, the argument (as Flew admits) follows the basic form of Hume's antisupernaturalism, critiqued above. All of these arguments assume that to be critical and historical one must be antisupernatural. By this view, a closed mind is prerequisite to doing "critical" historical study.

The principle that the present is the key to the past, or the past is known by analogy to the present is valid. This is so since those living in the present have no direct access to the past. The kind of causes known to produce certain kinds of effects in the present can be assumed to produce similar kinds of effects in the past.

But this principle does not rule out a credible belief in miracles in the past, even if no such miracles exist in the present. Fallacies are involved in the historical argument.

Uniform or uniformitarian?. Troeltsch and Flew confused principles of *uniformity* (analogy) and *uniformitarianism*. They assumed that all past events are uniformly the same as today's. This is not only an assumption, but it doesn't fit what even naturalistic scientists believe about origins. All scientists believe that the origin of the universe and the origin of life are singular and

unrepeatable events (*see* ORIGINS, SCIENCE OF). But if the past can be known only in terms of processes now at work, then there is no scientific basis for knowledge about them. Another problem with uniformitarianism is that processes change. Geological uniformitarians fail to account for catastrophes, climatic changes, landmass shifts, and other factors that might have altered geological forces.

Uniformitarianism illogically assumes that there have been no past singularities. While knowledge of the past is *based on* analogies in the present (uniformity), the *object* of this knowledge can be a singularity. Archaeologists may know on the basis of analogy that only intelligent beings can make projectile points. However, the making of one unique spear point by a particular craftsman in a particular tribe can also be studied in itself. What can be learned about this singular past event can become present knowledge—a basis for analogy when other spear points are discovered. By analogy scientists have learned that certain levels of specified complexity originate only in intelligent beings.

Analogy, properly understood, supports as credible the possibility that some past events had a supernatural intelligent cause. Even without analogy to the present, there is good evidence that the universe began (*see* BIG BANG), and that it had an intelligent supernatural cause.

Special pleading. The Historical argument against miracles makes a special pleading that evidence for individual events cannot be allowed unless the events are repeated. This weighs the evidence for all regularly occurring events, rather than for the particular event(s) at issue. This is not a standard rule of evidence. Further, it pleads that no miracle either has occurred, can, or ever will in today's world. Flew and Troeltsch are simply not omniscient enough to know this is true.

Begging the question. Flew also commits the fallacy of *petitio principii*. In practice, he begs the question when he asserts that miracles are “absolutely impossible” and that the critical thinker will dismiss them “out of hand.” But why should a critical thinker be so biased against the historical actuality of a miracle? Why should one begin with a methodology loaded against certain past events, before looking at the evidence?

Hindering scientific progress. Uniformitarian views have hampered the progress of science. The big bang theory is an example. Astrophysicist Arthur Eddington spoke of this special, explosive beginning of the universe as “repugnant,” “preposterous,” and “incredible” (Jastrow, 112). Albert Einstein made a mathematical error, so sure was he that the big bang was “senseless” (*ibid.*, 28).

The evidence is so compelling that many scientists now believe that the basic hydrogen atoms of the universe were created in milliseconds. Most astronomers today accept the reality of a great initial explosion. Here is a singularity, which by its nature cannot be repeated. Yet it is a viable theory of origins and the proper object of science, though scientists had to be dragged to it because it does hold definite theistic implications.

Appealing to the general to rule out the particular. A strange sort of logic works in the historical argument. One must judge all particular (special) events in the past on the basis of general (regular) events in the present. Why not use special events in the present as an analogy

for special events in the past? There are unique and particular “anomalies.” From a strictly scientific point of view a miracle is like an anomaly. Here the historical argument uses special pleading. Neither Troeltsch nor Flew allows evidence to count for *particular* events, in lieu of the evidence for general categories of events. There are far more regular and repeatable events than the unrepeatable kind. there is no evidence for the unrepeatable. It is like refusing to believe that someone won the lottery, because thousands more lost it. Along these same lines, the contemporary philosopher Douglas K. Erlandson argues that scientific law, as such, is concerned with general classes of events, whereas the supernaturalist is concerned with events that do not fit general classes. A belief in the latter does not upset belief in the former (Erlandson, 417–).

Proving too much. The historicist arguments prove that much of what naturalists believe about the past cannot be true. As Richard Whately showed in his famous satire on Hume's naturalistic skepticism (Whately, 224, 290), if one must reject unique events in the past because there is no analogy in the present, then the incredible history of Napoleon must be rejected.

Not critical enough. Actually, “critical history” is not critical enough. It does not criticize the unreasonable acceptance of presuppositions that eliminate valid historical knowledge. Far from being open to evidence, its naturalism eliminates in advance any miraculous interpretation of events in the past. It *legislates* meaning rather than *looks* for it.

Arguments from Science. Since the origin of modern science it has been common to claim that miracles are not scientific. Some critics object to miracles because they are said to be contrary to the very nature of the scientific procedure for handling irregular or exceptional events. They insist that when scientists come upon an irregular or anomalous event they do not posit a miracle. They broaden their understanding of natural processes to take in that event. To do otherwise would be to forsake the scientific method. Some individual arguments include:

Ninian Smart. Ninian Smart reasons that nothing in nature can be out of bounds for exploration. Otherwise it would stultify scientific research. But a belief that certain events are miraculous erects a bar against science. Hence, acceptance of miracles violates the proper domain of science (Smart, chap. 2). The argument can be summarized.

1. A miracle is an exception to a natural law.
2. In science, exceptions are goads to find a better explanation, not an indication to stop research.
3. Hence, accepting miracles stops scientific progress.

Therefore, a miracle cannot be identified ever as an irregular event or anomaly. Rather, it calls for further research. When one natural law does not explain an exception, scientists do not throw in the towel; they look again, more deeply. What is an exception to one scientific description (L1) can be included within a broader description (L2).

Patrick Nowell-Smith. The supernaturalist's claim that an event is a miracle because it cannot be explained in terms of scientific laws bothers Patrick Nowell-Smith. “We may believe him [the

supernaturalist] when he says that no scientific method known to him will explain it. . . . But to say that it is inexplicable as a result of natural agents is already beyond his competence as a scientist, and to say that it must be ascribed to supernatural agents is to say something that no one could possibly have the right to affirm on the evidence alone (Nowell-Smith, 245–46).

However strange an event, he argues, it must not be ascribed to the supernatural, because future scientists may very well explain it. At one time the bumblebee’s flight was unexplained by natural law. However, principles of this very natural occurrence have come to light in the discovery of power packs in the bee’s cells called *mitochondria*, which make flight by rapid wing motion possible. The argument can be described:

1. What is scientifically unexplained is not necessarily scientifically unexplainable.
2. Miracles are scientifically unexplained.
3. Miracles are not scientifically unexplainable.

An explanation qualifies as scientific, according to Nowell-Smith, if a hypothesis from which predictions can be made can afterwards be verified (ibid., 249). Further, the explanation must describe how the event comes about.

In this definition, “lawful” miracles should be explainable by laws that can be stated. If not, the event can be explained. “If we can detect any order in God’s interventions, it should be possible to extrapolate in the usual way and to predict when and how a miracle will occur” (ibid. 251). Nowell-Smith challenges supernaturalists to consider whether the notion of explanation does not necessarily include hypothesis and prediction and thought about whether the “supernatural” could play any part in it (ibid., 253).

Should it be objected that he is simply redefining the “natural” to include miracles, Nowell-Smith replies: “I will concede your supernatural, if this is all that it means. For the supernatural will be nothing but a new field for scientific inquiry, a field as different from physics as physics is from psychology, but not differing in principle or requiring any non-scientific method” (ibid.). This may be summarized:

1. Only what has predictive capabilities can qualify as an explanation of an event.
2. A miracle explanation cannot make verifiable predictions.
3. Therefore, a miracle explanation does not qualify as an explanation of the event.

The implications of this reasoning are that miracle explanations must become scientific or they cease to be explanations at all. So a miracle is methodologically unscientific. It is contrary to the scientific means of explaining events, a way that always involves the ability to predict similar events. Further, Nowell-Smith denies that rational agency is necessary to account for any anomaly in nature. Ultimately, all that happens will be shown to result from natural law.

Alistair McKinnon. Another opponent of miracles, Alistair McKinnon (see another McKinnon argument in the article MIRACLE .) put the scientific law argument this way:

1. A scientific law is a generalization based on past observation.
2. Any exception to a scientific law invalidates that law as such and calls for a revision of it.
3. A miracle is an exception to a scientific law.
4. Therefore, any so-called “miracle” would call for a revision of the present scientific law.

In McKinnon’s view, a miracle would be assumed to be a natural event under a new law that incorporates it into its natural explanation. Laws are like maps, and maps are never violated; they are revised when found to be in error.

Malcolm Diamond. Others have attempted to argue against miracles as opposition to scientific methodology. For example, Malcolm Diamond, professor of philosophy at Princeton University, insists that it is disastrous to accept miraculous exceptions to scientific laws. If one accepts some exceptions as supernatural, “scientific development would either be stopped or else made completely capricious, because it would necessarily be a matter of whim or whether one invoked the concept of miracle” (Diamond, 317).

Diamond sees two problems with supernaturalism. First, exceptions should not stop scientific research. They are, in fact, goads to further study. Second, exceptions should not necessarily be called miracles. Does the odd prove God? If not, how does one distinguish the unusual from the supernatural?

According to Diamond, “Allowing for the possibility of supernatural explanations of naturally observable occurrences is something that would, in effect, drive working scientists to opt right out of the scientific enterprise. . . . These scientists would not be able to investigate [the miracle]. . . . As scientists they would not be able to determine whether the exception was supernatural” (ibid., 320). Scientists must operate with autonomy. They must set their own rules and referee their own games. Therefore, although nothing logically would prevent a scientist from accepting a supernatural interpretation for an utterly extraordinary, the scientists would be selling out science.

Diamond concludes: “The answer that I shall offer on behalf of the naturalistic interpretation is pragmatic. It recommends reliance on the scientific explanations without pretending to be a conclusive refutation of supernaturalism” (ibid.).

The outline of this argument is pragmatic, based on the autonomy of the scientific method:

1. Scientists, as scientists, cannot give up looking for naturalistic explanations for every event.

2. To admit even one miracle is to give up looking for a natural explanation.
3. Therefore, to admit miracles is to give up being a scientist.

Evaluation. Unlike other arguments against miracles, the scientific objection does not try to prove that miracles are impossible or even incredible. If successful it would show that miracles are not identifiable by the scientific method. It leaves open the possibility that there are other ways to identify a miracle. If by definition the scientific method deals only with a certain class of events (the repeatable), then singular events such as miracles cannot be identified by the scientific method. But what such an argument does not prove is that miracles do not occur or that there is not some other way to identify them. Nor does it show that there is no other way to identify the scientific method by which a miracle could be identified, at least in part.

Anomalies and the scientific method. Even the scientific procedure that deals with regular repeatable events allows for exceptional events that do not call for the explanation of another natural law. A scientist who encounters an anomaly does not automatically revise previously held laws. If the exception is not repeatable, there is no right to use it as the basis for a new law. It is inappropriate to demand that *all* exceptional events be naturally caused, but only that repeatable events be explainable. So in the nonrepeatable miracle, there is no violation of a scientist's right to do science.

Science in the commonly understood sense deals with regularities, not singularities. One cannot expect a method geared to deal with regularities to eliminate the scientific viability of a miracle.

A scientific approach to the world is not limited to regular events. There are legitimate scientific approaches that deal with singular events, as even supernaturalists claim.

Even the scientific method admits exceptions or anomalies, and no scientist revises existing natural laws based on a single exception. Unless the scientist can show that it is a regular, repeatable part of nature, he has no basis on which to make a new natural law. There is no reason a miracle cannot fall into the broad category of the anomalous, even within the general sense of the scientific method.

Of course, there is more to a miracle than a mere anomaly. There are "divine" earmarks. However, even from a strictly scientific approach that deals with regularities, one cannot legitimately eliminate the possibility of identifying a miracle. To argue that every exception to a known natural law demands another natural explanation, simply begs the question. Such an argument goes beyond science and reveals a naturalistic bias (*see* MATERIALISM ; NATURALISM).

As theists have long insisted, if there is a God, then he cannot be locked out of his creation. If he had the ability to create the universe, he has the power to produce occasional but naturally unrepeatable exceptional acts within his world. The only effective way to disprove miracles is to disprove God (*see* GOD, ALLEGED DISPROOFS OF).

Confusion of categories. Even some naturalists have admitted that this argument is an *a priori* argument that can be refuted by noting that a supernaturally caused exception to a scientific law would not invalidate it. Scientific laws express regularities. A miracle is a special and nonrepeatable exception (Diamond, 316–17). One nonrepeatable exception does not call for revising a natural law. More likely it would be credited to faulty observation anyway. From a strictly scientific view, a nonrepeatable exception remains just that—an exception to known scientific laws. If, under specified conditions, the anomaly recurs, then a scientist has the right to call it a natural event. In this case, anomalies would be pointers to the development of a more general natural law.

Miracles, however, are not the result of natural laws. They were caused by the willed actions of rational agents, God and his representatives. That action of will is what cannot be repeated and therefore places miracles outside the realm of scientific observation. A miracle takes place because God wants it to. One cannot arrange for God to "want it" again so that scientists can watch. Miracles do not change our view of scientific laws, they simply step outside of them.

Since miracles are unrepeatable exceptions to known laws, they leave natural laws intact and therefore are not unscientific. Smart wrote, "Miracles are not experimental, repeatable. They are particular, peculiar events. . . . They are not small-scale laws. Consequently, they do not destroy large-scale laws."

Begging the question. If scientific objections are understood to eliminate the acceptance of miracles by a rational person, they are unsuccessful. They clearly beg the question by insisting that every event in nature must be considered a natural event. For if whatever happens—no matter how unrepeatable—must not be considered a miracle, miracles are eliminated in advance by definition. Even if a resurrection from the dead occurred, it could not be a miracle.

Despite the fact that he claims the problem must be attacked with an open mind (*ibid.*, 243), Nowell-Smith shows an invincible bias in favor of naturalism. His standards mandate that any event will be declared to be a natural event. He is, in fact, open only to naturalistic interpretations, not to the supernatural. That he begs the question is evident. He defines "explanation" in such a narrow way as to eliminate the possibility of a supernatural explanation. He arbitrarily insists that all explanations must be naturalistic in order to be counted.

The supernaturalist does not insist that "an event no matter how strange must have been due to a supernatural agent." It does seem likely that most strange events *are* natural. But the supernaturalist does object when Nowell-Smith says that supernatural agency *cannot* be part of the report of a strange event. The supernaturalist says that one should look at the evidence on its merits.

Nowell-Smith simply assumes that all phenomena ultimately admit a natural explanation (*ibid.*, 247). He cannot know this as a scientist. There is no empirical proof. This assumption is simply a matter of naturalistic faith. Even if he were presented with empirical evidence of a miracle, he makes it clear that he would never admit it to be supernatural. Pending discovery of a naturalistic explanation, he will persist in believing that an explanation can be found.

Neither is it necessary that all true explanations have predictive value. There are events he would call natural that no one can predict. If the naturalist replies that he cannot always predict an occurrence in practice but can in principle, the supernaturalist can make that level of prediction. In principle we know that a miracle will occur whenever God deems one necessary. If we knew all the facts, including the mind of God, we could predict precisely when the miracle would happen. Further, biblical miracles are past singularities. Like the origin of the universe, they are not currently being repeated. But no prediction can be made from any singularity; they can only be made from patterns. The past is not known by empirical science, but by forensic science. It is misdirected to ask for *predictions forward*. Rather one attempts to make *retrodictions backward*.

The supernaturalist can agree with Nowell-Smith that “the breakdown of *all* explanations in terms of present-day science does not . . . immediately force us outside the realm of the “natural”” (ibid., 248). The two part company when Nowell-Smith requires natural causes for miracles. Such a position goes beyond what is warranted by the evidence. The naturalist demonstrates a faith commitment that rivals the religious dedication of the most ardent believers in miracles.

One problem behind this kind of scientific naturalism is the confusion of naturalistic *origin* and natural *function*. Motors function in accord with physical laws, but physical laws do not produce motors; minds do. In like manner, the origin of a miracle is not the physical and chemical laws of the universe, even though the resulting event will operate in accord with natural law. While natural laws regulate the operation of things, they do not account for the origin of all things.

Methodological naturalism. Scientific arguments against miracles are a form of rigid methodological naturalism. The very method chosen does not admit the possibility that any event will ever be identified as a miracle. Explanations that cover regular events do not necessarily apply to singularities. Rounded stones in a river are produced according to describable natural forces. But no natural law can account for the faces on Mount Rushmore. Here a non-natural, intelligent cause is appropriated (see EVOLUTION, CHEMICAL ; TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT).

When a singularity is not known to be attributable to natural causes and demonstrates signs of divine intervention, then there are positive reasons to accept it as a miracle. The following are discussed with more detail in the article Miracle:

1. They have an *unusual character* as an irregular event.
2. They have a *theological dimension* as an act of God.
3. They have a *moral dimension*, since God is an absolutely perfect moral Being. One moral mark of a miracle is that it brings glory to God.
4. They have a *teleological dimension*. They are purposeful events.
5. They have a *doctrinal dimension*. Miracles are connected, directly or indirectly, with “truth claims” (Heb. 2:3-4 ; see MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF).

When an irregular, unrepeatable event, not known to be produced by natural causes, is accompanied by other marks of intervention, there is reason to identify it as an act of a theistic God (see GOD, EVIDENCE FOR).

Too restrictive a definition of science. The science arguments against miracles are based on an overly restrictive definition of science, one that deals only with repeatable events. Science also deals with singularities. True, the scientific method only tests regular, repeatable events. But scientists also recognize origin science, which is largely a study of singularities. The big bang origin of the universe is a radical singularity. The history of our planet is a singularity, yet it is the object of research. We would regard it as both strange and foolish for a geology teacher to rule out anything but a natural cause for the sculpted faces on Mount Rushmore. It would seem odd if an archaeologist were limited to natural causes for projectile points and pottery. Insisting that one who does not insist on natural causes cannot be scientific is to improperly restrict science.

Miracles and the integrity of science. We are now in a position to evaluate the charge that belief in miracles is unscientific. Diamond’s comments make evident his belief in the absolute autonomy of the scientific method. He assumes as a matter of faith, with only pragmatic justification, that the scientific method is *the* method for determining all truth. Indeed, it is not just the scientific method, but one aspect of the scientific approach—the search for natural causes—that is assumed to be the only approach to truth. Diamond’s arguments are vulnerable to several criticisms:

First, it is wrong to presuppose that the scientific method necessarily entails naturalism. Scientists, as scientists, need not be so narrow as to believe that nothing can ever count as a miracle. All a scientist needs to hold is the premise that every event has a cause and that the observable universe operates in an orderly way.

Second, it is wrong to assume that natural laws have dominion over every event, rather than every *regular* event. To assume that every irregular, unrepeatable event has a natural explanation is not science but metaphysics. Natural laws do not account for the origin of all events any more than the laws of physics alone explain the origin of an automobile. Natural laws account for the *operation* of these things.

Third, it is unscientific to be closed to reasonable explanations. If a God caused the universe to exist and cares for it, it is not unreasonable to expect that he can perform some regular activities and also some special events. The only way to effectively disprove this possibility is to disprove the existence of such a God, which most atheists agree is impossible to do (Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind*, chap. 12). The truly scientific and open-minded person will not dismiss in advance, logically or methodologically, the possibility of identifying some miraculous events in the defense of scientific autonomy.

Fourth, when the argument against miracles reduces to its basic premises, it becomes:

1. Whatever actually occurs in the natural world is a natural event.

2. Some so-called “miracles” have occurred.
3. Therefore, these miracles are really natural events.

This formation lays bare the circular reasoning of the naturalist’s argument. Whatever happens in the natural world is, *ipso facto* , a natural event. Whatever occurs *in* nature was caused *by* nature. Even Michael Polanyi seemed to fall into this trap when he wrote, “If the conversion of water into wine or the resurrection of the dead could be experimentally verified, this would strictly disprove their miraculous nature. Indeed, to the extent to which any event can be established in terms of natural science, it belongs to the natural order of things” (Jaki, 78). This, of course, assumes what is to be proven, that there is no supernatural Being who can act in nature. Just because an event occurs in the world, does not mean it was caused by the world. It may have been specially caused by a God who transcends the world.

The preservation of the scientific method. If miracles are allowed, how can one retain the integrity of the scientific method? If some events are ruled out of bounds to the scientists, then has not the supernaturalist closed the door on rational examination of some events? Positing a supernatural cause for the origin of some rare events in no way affects the domain of science, assuming science is based on a regular pattern of events. Operation science is naturalistic and has every right to demand explanatory control over all regular events. But science, as such, has no right to claim that it alone can explain singularities.

Science has unlimited authority in the classification of regular events. The scientist has a right, even an obligation, to examine all events, including anomalies. However, the singular, unrepeatable event that is not part of a regular pattern must be classified among the “not yet explainable as natural events.” Within this class are events that may have a supernatural cause. To assume that all not-yet-explained events are naturally explainable moves beyond science into philosophical belief in naturalism. Indeed, it rules out the possibility that there is a supernatural God who can intervene in the world he created. But this is contrary to the evidence (*see* GOD, EVIDENCE FOR).

Summary. Hume offered a forceful argument against miracles. But, strong as it may seem, the evaluation indicates that he was overly optimistic to believe that this argument could be “an everlasting check” and “useful as long as the world endures” to refute any credible claim for the miraculous. In fact, Hume’s argument is not successful. In the “hard” form he begs the question by assuming that miracles are, *by definition* , impossible. In the “soft” form of the argument, Hume ignores contrary evidence, begs the question, proves too much (for example, that Napoleon did not exist), is inconsistent with his own epistemology, and makes scientific progress impossible. In brief, to eliminate miracles before looking at them seems prejudicial. A wise person does not *legislate* in advance that miracles cannot be believed to have happened; rather he *looks* at the evidence to see if they did occur. So, for the rational mind, Hume’s efforts to eliminate miracles must be considered unsuccessful.

Hume was right to demand that witnesses meet criteria of trustworthiness. Indeed, courts of law depend on such criteria to determine life and death issues. However, unbeknown to Hume, his tests for the truthfulness of witnesses, which he believed would eliminate the credibility of

miracles, actually verify the trustworthiness of New Testament witnesses, particularly the miracle of the resurrection.

Hume’s self-canceling-witness argument fails because it is based on false presuppositions which, when corrected, boomerang into a proof for the uniqueness of Christianity. His argument is based on the premise that all alleged miracles are created equal. But this is not true, either of the nature of the alleged miracle or of the number and reliability of the witnesses.

In evaluating the historical argument against miracles it must be noted that there is a crucial difference between the principle of *uniformity* (or analogy), on which all valid inquiry is based, and the principle of *uniformitarianism* . The latter is a naturalistic dogma which rules out in advance by its very methodological principle the credibility of the miraculous. Troeltsch’s principle of analogy, used to reject miracles, is an example of historical uniformitarianism. A form of historical naturalism, it assumes that all events in history are naturally explainable. This bias, however, is contrary to both rational thought in general and scientific thought in particular.

Various attempts have been made to prove that belief in miracles is contrary to scientific explanations or to scientific methods. Some argue that miracles, contrary to natural laws, are unpredictable; others contend that miracles are unrepeatable or would sacrifice the autonomy of science. Such arguments beg the question in favor of naturalism. They assume the scientific method must be defined in such a way that excludes acceptance of miracles. The central, though hidden, premise is that every event in the world must have a natural cause. If one does not now have that explanation, it must be believed to ultimately exist. The supernaturalist points out that one does not have to be incorrigibly naturalistic to be scientific. Properly speaking, the domain of scientific law is the realm of *regular* , not *all* , events.

Miracles do not destroy the integrity of the scientific method. Science is possible so long as theists believe that the world is orderly and regular and operates in accordance with the law of causality. If the origin of the world can have a supernatural cause without violating the laws by which it operates, such a God can also cause other events without violating the regular natural operation. Since empirical science deals with the way things *operate* , not how they *originate* , the origination of an event by a supernatural cause in no way violates natural law. As physicist George Stokes observed, a new effect can be introduced into the natural world without suspending the ordinary operation of the world (Stokes, 1063).

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Miracles, Cessation of Sign Gifts. Those who accept biblical miracles debate among one another as to whether the special gift of miracles used to confirm a revelation from God (*see* MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF) has ceased since the times of the apostles. The issue has significance for apologetics. First, existence of apostolic, sign gift-type miracles today raises the issue of whether the New Testament miracles uniquely confirmed the truth claims of Christ and the apostles, as recorded in Scripture. Second, if miracles that confirm divine truth claims exist today, are truth claims they accompany to be accepted on a par with those of Scripture? Has divine revelation ceased?

The select individuals known as apostles were given certain, unmistakable signs of their office (2 Cor. 12:12). These sign gifts included the ability to raise the dead on command (Matt. 10:8 ; Acts 20:9–10); heal diseases immediately that were naturally incurable (Matt. 10:8 ; John 9:1–7), instantly exorcise evil spirits (Matt. 10:8 ; Acts 16:16–18), speak messages in known languages they had never personally studied (Acts 2:1–8 , cf. 10:44–46), and pass on supernatural gifts to others to assist them in the apostolic mission (Acts 6:6 , cf. 8:5–6 ; 2 Tim. 1:6). On one occasion (Acts 5:1–11), apostles passed a supernatural sentence of death on two people who had "lied to the Holy Spirit."

Defense of Ongoing Miracles. Proponents of the proposition that miraculous gifts do exist in the church today defend their claims on several arguments:

God performed miracles in redemptive history. They are recorded from Genesis through Revelation (*see* MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE). There seems to be no reason to believe they would cease arbitrarily with the apostles.

God has not changed (Mal. 3:6). Jesus is "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8). If the miracle-working God has not changed, then why would miracles cease?

Jesus spoke of continuing miracles. He said, "Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12). In his commission as recorded in Mark, Jesus said that miracles would accompany the gospel as it went out (16:17–18).

Miracles manifest God’s greatness (Exod. 7:17) and glory (John 11:40), to deliver God’s children in need (Exod. 14:21 ; Deut. 4:34 ; Acts 12:1–19), and to communicate God’s messages to his people (Exod. 4:8 ; Heb. 2:3–4). These needs continue today.

There are examples of miraculous manifestations as performed through the apostles, including the gifts of tongues, special healing, and even being raised from the dead (see Wimber, *Power Evangelism* , 44).

The Position that Miracles Ceased. Both positive and negative arguments are offered for the position that the special gift of miracles ended with the time of the apostles.

Proving Present Miracles from the Past. Logically there is no connection between past and present miraculous occurrences. Even during thousands of years of Bible history miracles were clustered in three very limited periods: (1) The Mosaic period: from the exodus through the taking of the promised land (with a few occurrences in the period of the judges); (2) The prophetic period: from the late kingdom of Israel and Judah during the ministries of Elijah, Elisha, and to a lesser extent Isaiah; (3) The apostolic period: from the first-century ministries of Christ and the apostles. Occurrences of miracles were neither continuous nor without purpose. Theologically the three great periods of miracles have certain things in common: Moses needed miracles to deliver Israel and sustain the great number of people in the wilderness (Exod. 4:8). Elijah and Elisha performed miracles to deliver Israel from idolatry (see 1 Kings 18). Jesus and the apostles showed miracles to confirm establishment of the new covenant and its deliverance from sin (Heb. 2:3–4). That miracles occurred at special times for special purposes is no argument that they will exist when these conditions no longer prevail.

Changeless Attributes; Changing Acts. God never changes, but his program on earth does. There are different stages of his redemptive plan, and what is true in one stage is untrue in another. We no longer are required not to eat some forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:16–17). We need not offer a lamb as sacrifice for sins (Exodus 12). We no longer are led by the twelve apostles and Paul; rather we have God’s final revelation in Scripture. Note that 2 Corinthians 12:12 calls miracles “the signs of an apostle.”

Promises to Apostles. Jesus did promise that miracles would continue after he left, but he did not say they would endure until his return. It was specifically to the apostles that he made the statement of John 14:12 . The antecedent of *you* in that promise is the eleven who were with him. His promise to give the Holy Spirit’s baptism, with which came the gift of tongues, was only given to the apostles (Acts 1:1–2). Only the apostles received the fulfillment of this promise at Pentecost (Acts 1:26 ; cf. 2:1 , 7 , 14). Nonapostolic instances of tongues witness the salvation of the first Samaritans and Gentiles and those on whom the apostles laid hands (cf. Acts 8:17–18 ; 2 Tim. 1:6) or in the presence of an apostle’s proclamation (Acts 10:44 ; cf. 11:15). The reference to special “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12) make no sense if these gifts were possessed by anyone other than the apostles or those on whom Christ and the apostles conferred the gift.

Desire Does Not Prove Fulfillment. There is a desire for ongoing miracles, but not all felt needs are real needs. Job received no miracle cure. Nor did Epaphras. Nor did the apostle Paul,

who earnestly desired to be healed (2 Corinthians 12). The moving testimony of Joni Earickson Tada includes her search for a miraculous recovery before she came to terms with the ways God had decided to use her as a quadriplegic.

When compared with the periods that prompted miracles in Bible times, there is no actual need for sign miracles today. Miracles confirmed new revelation (Exod. 4:6 ; John 3:2 ; Acts 2:22). But the Bible is so much more than the New Testament saints possessed, and it is complete and sufficient for faith and practice. Pentecost does not need to be repeated, any more than Calvary and the empty tomb.

Though miracles can manifest God’s greatness, glory, and deliverance, he accomplishes these things in other ways. The heavens declare his glory and greatness (Psalm 19 ; Isaiah 40). Spiritual deliverance is accomplished in the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16). God works through general and special providence without suspending natural laws (see MIRACLES, MAGIC AND).

Even when there is an apparent need for divine intervention, there are things for which God never performs a miracle today. He does not delay the appointed time of death (Rom. 5:12 ; Heb. 9:27). This does not mean God never will supernaturally intervene to solve the problem of death. A time has been appointed for it at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). Meanwhile we await bodily redemption (Rom. 8:23)—the miracle of the resurrection.

The Problem of Sign Gifts. The claim that apostolic sign gifts still exist fails to distinguish between the *fact* of miracles and the *gift* of miracles:

Gift of Miracles	Fact of Miracles
Limited to Bible times	Occurs any time
Temporary	Permanent
Done through humans	Done without humans
Confirms new revelation	Does not confirm revelation
Apologetic value	No apologetic value

The view that sign miracles ceased with the apostles does not demand that God has performed no miracles since the first century. It argues that the special *gift* of doing miraculous feats possessed by the apostles ceased once the divine origin of their message was confirmed. In Hebrews 2:3–4 , the writer of Hebrews referred to these special sign gifts of an apostle as already past in about 69 when he spoke of the message “first announced by the Lord.” “God also testified [in the past] to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” Jude, writing later (after 70), speaks of the faith that was “once for all entrusted to the saints” (vs. 3). Jude exhorts his hearers to “remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold” (vs. 17). Here also the miraculously confirmed apostolic message was spoken of as past by A.D. 70. In spite of the profusion of apostolic miracles (cf. Acts 28:1–10) up to the end of Acts, about 60–61, there is no record of apostolic miracles in Paul’s Epistles after this time.

This argument from the sudden absence of miracles after their earlier abundance is not to be confused with a fallacious “argument from silence.” The Bible is not silent on the nature, purpose, and function of these special apostolic miracles (see, for example, 2 Cor. 12:12 ; Heb. 2:3-4). This function of confirming apostolic revelation fits with their cessation, since they were not needed after the revelation was confirmed.

It is to be noted that Paul apparently could not heal some of his own trusted helpers (Phil. 2:26 ; 2 Tim. 4:20), asking for prayer or recommending that they take medicine (1 Tim. 5:23). Even while Paul was doing miracles he was unable to heal his own physical infirmity, Gal. 4:13 . In fact, there is never a sign in Scripture of anyone performing a miracle for their own benefit. That illness may have resulted from his being blinded by God or an infliction sent to humble him. Either way, Paul regarded it as increasing his value as a servant through his weakness. Miracles were to be exercised according to God’s will.

Special signs given to the apostles established their authority as representatives of Christ in founding the church. Jesus promised special “power” to them as his witnesses (Acts 1:8). In 2 Corinthians 12:12 , Paul offered his miracles as confirmations of his authority. Hebrews 2:3-4 speaks of the special apostolic miracles as confirming their witnesses to Christ. It was the pattern of God from Moses on to give such special confirmation for his key servants (Exodus 4 ; 1 Kings 18 ; John 3:2 ; Acts 2:22).

The cessation view concludes, based on both Scripture and history, that extraordinary sign gifts, such as the apostles exercised, have not been possessed by any since their time. While special *gift* miracles have ceased, the *fact* of miracles has not necessarily vanished. There is no evidence, however, of groups or persons who possess special gifts. Given the media penchant for sensationalism, if anyone had such powers it would be a widely publicized fact. Apostolic miracles had at least three characteristics missing in the acts performed by any modern miracle worker.

The Characteristics of New Testament Miracles. First, New Testament miracles were *instantaneous*. When Jesus or the apostles performed a miracle the results were always immediate. The man with a lifelong infirmity was told to “ ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked” (John 5:8-9). Peter took the hand of the beggar, and “instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong” (Acts 3:7). Even the two-stage miracle of Mark 8:22-25 took moments, and each stage had immediately intended results. There are no gradual healing over days or weeks. They were all immediate.

Second, a New Testament miracle *never failed*. A miracle is a special act of God, and God cannot fail. Further, there is no record that anyone who received one relapsed into the condition again. If there had been relapses, enemies of the gospel message would have quickly used them to discredit Christ or the apostles.

Of course those who were raised from the dead died again. Jesus alone received a permanent, immortal resurrection body (1 Cor. 15:20). Lazarus died, again, when his moment had come. The final and lasting resurrection miracle will be at Christ’s second coming (1 Cor. 15:52-53).

Third, New Testament sign gifts as exercised by Jesus and the apostles were *successful on all kinds of conditions*— even incurable diseases and dead people. They healed people who were born blind (John 9) and even dead and rotting (John 11). Further, they healed all kinds of disease, not just the easier kinds (Matt. 10:8). Sometimes, they healed everyone brought to them in the entire area (Acts 28:9). It is a verifiable fact that no one today possesses the special powers of Jesus and the apostles to instantaneously cure all sicknesses and even raise the dead on command (Acts 9 , 20). These special “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12), along with the ability to give people the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18), special gifts (2 Tim. 1:6), and smite lying Christians with death (Acts 5), have ceased.

Fourth, unlike the miracles of apostolic times, modern miracles do not confirm new revelation, nor do they establish the credentials of God’s messengers. The person’s fidelity in obeying and proclaiming Scripture now establishes the message. Attempts to stress the miraculous or to claim supernatural gifts has now become a *disqualifying* , rather than a *qualifying* , mark. This is especially true among those who claim to foretell the future. For those who make such claims, the biblical standard for accuracy is absolutely no false predictions (Deut. 18:22). Since new revelation ceased with the apostles, prophetic and other miraculous claims should be seriously distrusted.

Jesus the Final Revelation. Jesus was the full and final revelation of God. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe” (Heb. 1:1-2). Jesus informed the apostles that his revelation would be continued by the Holy Spirit, who “will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you” (John 14:26). Using the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit fulfills the role once taken by the prophets: “He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13). It is clear that the apostles were the divinely authorized agents through which the Holy Spirit proclaimed the final revelation of Jesus Christ.

Indeed, the apostles claimed this revelatory power (John 20:31 ; 1 Cor. 2:13 ; 1 Thess. 4:2 ; 2 Thess. 2:2 ; 1 John 2:19 ; 4:6), claiming the church was “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph. 2:20). The early church recognized this authority and “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). The apostles were the eyewitnesses of Christ (Acts 1:22), even Paul (1 Cor. 9:1 ; 15:5-9). Since these divinely authorized channels of “all truth” died in the first century, it follows that divine revelation ceased with them. If revelation ceased, there was no longer a need for miracle signs of a new revelation.

Conclusion. Arguments for the continuance of gift miracles miss the mark. While God does not change, his actions differ with different times. The purpose of signs and wonders was to confirm new revelation, but revelation ceased with the apostles. This is substantiated by the fact that no one since their time has actually possessed their unique power to instantaneously heal and even raise the dead. This does not mean God cannot do miracles now. But such miracles are not connected with any truth claims, nor are they a gift possessed by an individual. Whatever truly miraculous event that may occur has no apologetic value.

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Miracles, False. Distinguishing a true from a false miracle is important to the defense of the Christian faith. For miracles are the unique way God confirms a truth claim to be from him (see MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF ; MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE). But the counterfeit cannot be detected unless one knows the characteristics of a genuine.

A true miracle has preconditions. A miracle is a special act of God, and there cannot be acts of God unless there is a God who can perform these special acts. Miracles can occur only within the context of a theistic worldview (see THEISM). A miracle is a divine intervention in the world. God cannot “intervene” unless he is in some real sense transcendent over it. Transcendence must also mean that God has *super-natural* power. A God who created the world out of nothing, *ex nihilo* (see CREATION, VIEWS OF), has the power to intervene.

Atheists look at the same event as a theist, for example the resurrection of Christ, and from the viewpoint of their worldview see no miracle (see ATHEISM ; RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR). Whatever happened must be an anomaly, unusual, perhaps, but someday explainable through natural processes (see NATURALISM). If confronted with a resurrection, pantheists do not admit a divine intervention has occurred, for they do not believe in a God who created all things (see PANTHEISM). Pantheists hold that God is all things. Hence, a resurrection could only be an unusual event within the world, not a supernatural event from outside it.

Description of a True Miracle. The three words Scripture uses to describe a miracle help delineate that meaning more precisely. Each of the three words for supernatural events (*sign* , *wonder* , *power*) delineates an aspect of a miracle. For a full discussion of these elements see the article MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE . From the human vantage point, a miracle is an unusual event (“wonder”) that conveys and confirms an unusual message (“sign”) by means of unusual power (“Power”). From the divine vantage point a miracle is an act of God (“power”) that attracts the attention of the people of God (“wonder”) to the Word of God (by a “sign”).

According to the Bible, a miracle has five dimensions that together differentiate a true miracle from a false miracle. First, a true miracle has an *unnatural dimension* . A burning bush that is not consumed, fire from heaven, and walking on water are not normal occurrences. Their unusual character commands attention. Second, a true miracle has a *theological dimension* . It presupposes the theistic God who can perform these special acts. Third, a true miracle has a *moral dimension* . It manifests the moral character of God (see GOD, NATURE OF). There are no evil miracles, because God is good. A miracle that punishes or judges establishes God’s nature as just.

Fourth, a miracle has a *teleological dimension* . Unlike magic (see MIRACLES, MAGIC AND), miracles never entertain (see Luke 23:8). Their overall purpose is to glorify the Creator. Though unnatural, they fit into creation and befit the nature of the Creator. The virgin birth, for example, was supernatural in its operation, unnatural in its properties, but purposeful in its product. It was unnatural, yet not anti-natural. Mary’s virgin conception resulted in a normal nine-month pregnancy and birth (see DIVINE BIRTH STORIES). Fifth, miracles in the Bible, particularly the gifts of miracles, had a *doctrinal dimension*. They directly or indirectly verified truth claims. They show that a prophet is truly sent from God (Deut. 18:22). They confirm the truth of God through the servant of God (Acts 2:22 ; 2 Cor. 12:12 ; Heb. 2:3–4). Message and miracle go hand-in-hand.

Distinguishing Marks of a Miracle. In addition to its dimensions, a true miracle has distinguishing marks. The most basic is that a *true miracle is an exception to natural law* . Natural laws are regular, predictable events, but miracles are special, unpredictable events. Of course, there are some unusual natural events or anomalies that are sometimes confused with miracles. Comets, eclipses, and other natural phenomena were once thought to be miracles, but are not. Meteors pass our way infrequently, but they are purely natural and predictable. Eclipses are natural and predictable. Earthquakes are relatively unpredictable, but as scientists understand them better they know where they will occur, if not precisely when. That they are not miracles does not mean they do not belong to God’s special providence. He uses them and is in control of them. We can be sure that sometimes he intervenes in their operation in dramatic ways. A fog at Normandy aided the Allied Forces’ invasion of Europe on D-Day and the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. Fog has natural causes, but the timing of this one was an evidence of God’s providence. But it was no miracle. Bullets bouncing off the chests of Allied soldiers would have been a miracle.

A true miracle also produces immediate results (see HEALINGS, PSYCHOSOMATIC). In Matthew 8:3 , Jesus touched a man and immediately he was cured of his leprosy. All of the miraculous healings by Jesus and the apostles had such immediacy. No miracle took months, or hours. Only one required a few minutes, because it was a two-stage miracle—actually two interconnected instantaneous acts of God (Mark 8:23–25). By contrast, natural events take time and process. It takes a whole season to grow, harvest, grind, and mix wheat flour for bread, but Jesus made it instantly (John 6). It takes eighteen years or longer to grow an adult human being, but God created Adam immediately (Gen. 1:27 ; 2:7).

A characteristic of a true miracle, is that *it always brings glory to God* . Occult “magic” brings glory to the magician, and psychosomatic “cures” to the one who performs them. Satanic

delusions (see 2 Thess. 2:9 ; Rev. 16:14) are lies (2 Thess. 2:9) that do not glorify the God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2 ; Heb. 6:18).

While miracles are not natural events, *they bring good to the natural world*. The resurrection is the ultimate example. It reverses death and brings back the good of life (*see* Romans 8). Healing restores the body to the way God made it, which was “good” (Gen. 1:27–31). Even “negative” miracles are good in that it is good for God’s justice to defeat sin.

True miracles never fail. They are acts of the God for whom “all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26). Since God cannot fail, neither can miracles. This does not mean that any servant of God can perform a miracle at any time. Miracles occur only according to God’s will (Heb. 2:3–4 ; 1 Cor. 12:11). Further, true miracles have no relapses. If a person is miraculously healed, that healing is permanent. Pseudo-miracles, particularly the psychosomatic kind, often fail. They do not work on people who do not believe, and sometimes they do not work on those who do believe. When they do work, their effect is often only partial and/or temporary.

Kinds of False Miracles. As noted above, many unusual events are attributable to God that are not true miracles. God acts through natural processes. Other unusual events are acts of human beings (and/or deceiving spirits, called demons). These are not real miracles either. Satan can fool, but he cannot truly work transcendently over nature—and never intentionally for God’s glory.

Magical Tricks. A true miracle is distinguishable from magic (*see* MIRACLES, MAGIC AND). Most modern magicians do not seriously pretend that the illusions they perform are anything more than entertainment that “fools” the public. Those who watch are intended to walk away mystified about how the magician did it, but assured that the magician and his assistants did “do it.” This is not like occult acts unless an illusion is performed for occultic reasons. Magical tricks involve innocent deception, but miracles involve no deception. Magic has a purely natural explanation; miracles do not. A miracle is under God’s control, whereas magic is under human control. Like all human actions, magic can be used for good or evil. It is not evil in itself.

Psychosomatic Curses. Mind-body interactions, psychosomatic illnesses and healing do not usually involve pretend or neurotic illnesses and charlatan faith-healers. This complex and poorly understood subject is covered with some depth in the article HEALINGS, PSYCHOSOMATIC . In this article it is sufficient to say that psycho-soma, mind-over-body cures are not miraculous. Mental cures require faith. Miracles do not. Whether using the placebo effect, touching the television as a “point of contact” with a “healer,” or more directly therapeutic tools like acupuncture and biofeedback mind-training, psychosomatic healings can do good or ill. They use God’s marvelous body design to work healing. But they should never be misrepresented as direct interventions or true miracles. They are human phenomena and are common to many religions.

Anomalies of Nature. As noted miracles must not be confused with a natural anomaly, like a lunar eclipse. The latter is unusual but not unnatural. Miracles are not naturally repeatable. Anomalies are predictable. The flight of a bumble bee was an anomaly for many years, but since it occurred regularly it was predictable even before it was explainable. Anomalies lack the theological, moral, and teleological dimensions.

Special Providence. Some events are caused by God indirectly, not directly. That is, God uses natural laws to accomplish them. These may be quite remarkable and may stimulate faith, but they are not supernatural. Robert Müller gathered his English orphans around the dining table and gave thanks for food they did not at that moment have to eat. At that time a wagon loaded with bread broke down in front of the orphanage, and all of it was given to Müller. That was an act of wonderful providence, but it was not a miracle.

Satanic Signs. One of the most controversial dimensions of the topic of false miracles is that of Satanic “signs.” The Bible uses the same word for miracle (sign”) of some unusual manifestations of Satan. Many theologians call these events “miracles.” The question of whether Satan can perform miracles is made difficult because of this common usage of the same word “miracle.” However, if the apologetic value of miracles is to be preserved, there must be some way to distinguish a divine miracle from a Satanic one. Most evangelical biblical scholars agree on some fundamental facts: Satan is a created being (Col. 1:15–16). He is not all-powerful (Rev. 20:10). He cannot create life (Gen. 1:21 ; Deut. 32:39). He cannot raise the dead (Gen. 1:21). He is a master deceiver (John 8:44).

Given these facts, there is no reason to grant that Satan can perform truly supernatural events. As a master magician and super-scientist he can deceive almost anyone he wishes (see Matt. 24:24). Indeed, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” (1 John 5:19) who is “the prince and the power of the air” (Eph. 2:2). And “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not” (2 Cor. 4:3–4). For “Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

Satan’s powers, though great, are finite and God’s are infinite. It thus seems best to distinguish a true miracle from a Satanic sign in both name and ability. God performs true miracles; Satan does false signs. God does genuine miracles; Satan does counterfeit miracles. This is precisely what the Bible calls them in 2 Thess. 2:9 when it speaks of “The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of *counterfeit* miracles, signs and wonders.”

Just as there are marks of miracles, there are marks of a work of Satan, which are shown in the accompanying chart.

Divine Miracle	Satanic Sign
actual supernatural act	only a supernormal acts
under Creator’s control	under creature’s control
never associated with the occult	associated with the occult
connected with the true God	frequently connected with pantheistic or polytheistic gods
associated with truth	associated with error
associated with good	associated with evil
involves truth prophecies	involves falsehoods prophecies
glorifies the Creator	glorifies the creature

Satanic signs are not supernatural. False signs are unusual. They may be supernormal and extraordinary. But they are not miraculous. They can be recognized as false signs if they are not successful, they are not immediate or instantaneous, they are not permanent. As with Moses and the magicians of Egypt or Elijah and the prophets of Baal (Exod. 8–12 ; 1 Kings 18), Satan’s signs lose in a contest with God.

Satanic signs are associated with error. False signs and false teaching go together. “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons” (1 Tim. 4:1). There is “a spirit of truth and a spirit of falsehood” (1 John 4:6). So false teaching will not be confirmed by a true miracle. False signs will be connected with false teachings. A true prophet does not give false prophecies. If the predicted signs do not come to pass, then it was a false sign. False teachings connected with false signs might include that: There are gods other than the one true theistic God (Deut. 6:4 ; 13:1–3). Worship can use images or idols (Exod. 20:3–4). Jesus is not God (Col. 2:9). Jesus did not come in human flesh (1 John 4:1–2). We should contact departed spirits (Deut. 18:11). We can predict the future (Deut. 18:21–22). Fallible or partly true revelations can come from God (Heb. 6:18). Christ does not have to be at the center of life (Rev. 19:10).

Satanic signs are associated with moral evil. Counterfeit miracles tend to accompany moral rebellion and anger with God (1 Sam. 15:23), sexual immorality (Jude 7), asceticism (1 Cor. 7:5 ; 1 Tim. 4:3), legalism (Col. 2:16–17), pride in alleged visions (Col. 2:18), lying and deception (1 Tim. 4:2 ; John 8:44), and other works of the flesh (cf. Gal. 5:19).

Satanic signs are associated with the occult. Occult practices that can accompany Satanic signs include contacts with spirits (Deut. 18:11); the use of channelers, mediums, or trances (Deut. 18:11); losing control of one’s faculties (1 Cor. 14:32); disorderly conduct (1 Cor. 14:40); use of crystals, stones, rods or other means of divination (Deut. 18:11 ; Exod. 21:21); mind-emptying Eastern meditation, chanting or the use of repetitive phrases (Matt. 6:7); self-deification (Gen. 3:5 ; 2 Thess. 2:9); astrology (Deut. 4:19 ; Isa. 47:13–15); idolatry or the use of images in worship (Ex. 20:3–4); experiencing apparitions of dead persons (Deut. 18:11 ; 1 Cor. 10:18–21 ; 2 Cor. 11:14).

Satanic signs are limited in power. Satan can imitate God’s miracles but not duplicate them. Again, the miracles of Moses and Elijah over the Egyptian magicians and Baal priests demonstrate this superiority. Some have wrongly supposed that Satan can create life and raise the dead. This is clearly contrary to Scripture. Only God is the creator of living creatures (Gen. 1:21 cf. Deut. 32:39 ; 1 Sam. 2:2 , 6 ; Job 1:1). Satan himself is a created being (Col. 1:15–16), and creatures by nature do not create life. Satan’s workers admitted that they could not create even lice in Exodus 8:18–19 .

Raising the dead was a special sign of an apostle (Matt. 10:8 ; 2 Cor. 12:12). If Satan could do it, it would hardly be a distinguishing sign of God’s apostle. And if Satan could raise the dead, he could duplicate the resurrection—the crowning proof of Christ’s claim to be God (Matt. 12:40 ; John 2:19–21 ; 10:18)—and thus subvert the uniqueness of the Christian apologetic. The evidence for the resurrection of Christ would not have been “infallible proofs” (

Acts 1:3 NKJV). In fact, if Satan could do the same miracles God can do, then there would be no supernatural way to discern truth. For Satan could confirm lying prophets to be telling the truth. Likewise, if Satan could give infallible prophecies (*see* PROPHECY, AS PROOF OF THE BIBLE), the test that a false prophecy is a sign of a false prophet would be ineffective (Deut. 18:22).

Two texts are sometimes misapplied to support the thesis that Satan can create life or raise the dead. Upon scrutiny, neither is a legitimate example of life-giving power. One is the creating of serpents from rods by the magicians of Egypt. However, the magicians themselves admitted that they could not create life in Exod. 8:18–19 . They were trained in illusion and deception. Some modern Eastern snake handlers have been seen to make certain snakes appear to go rigid.

The second instance is a prophecy about what Satan will do in the final confrontation with God (Revelation 13). The second “beast . . . was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast that it should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the [first] beast to be killed” (Rev. 13:15 NKJV). This, it claimed is proof that Satan can create life. If the power in fact was given by God, it is conceivable that the power to enliven will be granted to the beast. More likely this is speaking metaphorically, as when Jesus told Pilate, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above” (John 19:11). Note also that it is not a human being who has died and is given life here. Rather, it is an “image” (we are not told what sort) of the beast that is given breath. Further, it is not given life but simply “breath.” This could refer to the image being animated or made life-like. There are plenty of scenarios in which this prophetic vision would be fulfilled without Satan giving life to anything.

False Claims to Resurrection. Non-Christian religions and some fringe Christian groups have claimed great miracles, including the ability to raise the dead. No instance of an actual resurrection has been substantiated with anything like the evidence for the resurrection of Christ. Most are patently false.

Some are simply fraudulent tricks. Such is the case of the African witch doctor who claimed to have killed a man to appease the gods and then restored him to life. Illusionist Andre Kole, who has exposed many occult charades, discovered that the witch doctor had dug a tunnel by which the man he faked killing had escaped, and later returned (see Geisler, 118).

Some alleged resurrections are mystically induced “comas.” Some Indian gurus are able to slow down their body processes by altering their state of consciousness. This enables them to spend hours in a grave with little oxygen. At least one modern escape artist was able to escape from a coffin buried under nine feet of dirt in an hour and a half. He made no claim to resurrection. He simply learned to conserve the oxygen from his large coffin while digging through loose soil to the surface.

Some cases are simply medical resuscitations. Medical science performs resuscitation regularly on people who are clinically but not actually dead. An actual resurrection occurs when someone was physically dead. By contrast, Jesus raised Lazarus after he had been buried for four days and his body was decomposing (John 11:39).

Some alleged resurrections are merely cases where individuals fainted or went into a coma. Evangelist and faith-healer Oral Roberts claimed to have resurrected people from the dead. When pressed for names and addresses, he declined. He finally mentioned one girl who had passed out in his service. When asked how he knew she was dead, he said her body felt cold and that both he and the girl's mother believed she was dead.

Resurrections were reported in Indonesian revivals (see Geisler, 71–72). When George Peters researched the matter first-hand, he found no evidence of real physical resurrections. He discovered, rather, that the word for “death” in the language can also refer to states of unconsciousness, such as fainting and comas (Peters, 88).

Claims of resurrections are still made, but no case has been made for a real physical resurrection from the dead (see RESURRECTION, PHYSICAL NATURE OF). Anyone who truly possessed this power would be thronged by crowds. Jesus had to pledge people to silence about his miracles (Matt. 8:4 ; 17:9). He was so besieged by miracle-seeking crowds that he often did not have time to eat (Mark 6:31 ; John 6:24). But no one since the time of the apostles is known to have possessed these kinds of powers.

God could raise the dead. He will raise all the dead one day (John 5:28–30 ; Rev. 20:4–5). Until then it is not something he is likely to do.

Conclusion. True miracles are truly supernatural; false miracles are, at best, only supernormal. Satanic signs are earmarked by association with evil and falsehood. Supernatural acts are distinguished by good and truth. Nor does Satan have the power to perform a truly supernatural act. His are always deceptions and usually obvious counterfeits to anyone who knows the signs. He is the master magician and a super scientist. But only God can create life and raise the dead. Only God can infallibly predict the future. Only God can instantaneously cure the “incurable.” Satan's power is finite and evil. God's power is infinite and good, and his supernatural acts give evidence.

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Miracles, Magic and. Crucial to the apologetic use of miracles is the ability to distinguish true miracles from false ones. Many religions claim to be “proven” by miraculous deeds. While Judaism claims that Moses' rod became a serpent and Christianity holds that Jesus walked on water, Islam's Muhammad is supposed to have moved a mountain, and Hindu gurus claim the power to levitate themselves.

New Age prophet Benjamin Creme offers a spirit of power and divination that “overshadowed” Jesus and is now available to followers of “the Christ”: “It is this which has enabled them to perform what at that time were called miracles, which today are called spiritual or esoteric healing. Daily, all over the world, there are miracles of healing being performed. . . .”

If a miracle is properly an act of God that suspends natural laws with a purpose of confirming the source of truth in God, what are we to make of such sales pitches? Can we tell what is truly miraculous from what is not of God and could be demonic? Is it possible to define a miracle in such a way as to exclude false claims and other kinds of unusual events?

The Problem of Definition. According to theism, a miracle is a supernatural intervention by a transcendent God into the natural world. But pantheism, like atheism, says that there is no God beyond the universe. Hence, all events have natural causes. They disagree only on whether “is limited to the physical or can include the spiritual. As the pantheistic “Jesus” of the *Aquarian Gospel of Jesus Christ* says, “All things result from natural law.” Even Christian Science says that a miracle is, “that which is divinely natural, but must be learned humanly; a phenomenon of Science.” Instead of saying that there are no miracles, pantheists redefine miracles as a manipulation of natural law. In a classic view of pantheism, the *Star Wars* films, Luke Skywalker learned to use “the force” (natural law) in an almost spiritual power that enabled him to do his incredible deeds. Pantheists have even tried to incorporate advanced physics into explanations of the supernormal. Fritjof Capra's book *The Tao of Physics* is an updated version of the pantheistic doctrine that all matter is at heart mystical: “The basic oneness of the universe is not only the central characteristic of the mystical experience, but is also one of the most important revelations of modern physics. It becomes apparent at the atomic level and manifests itself more and more as one penetrates deeper into matter, down into the realm of subatomic particles.”

So the source of pantheistic “miracles” is not an all powerful personal God who is beyond the universe. It is an impersonal Force within the universe. Hence, these unusual events are not really supernatural; they are only *supernormal*.

Supernatural versus Supernormal. Christianity does not deny that supernormal events take place, but we deny that they are truly unique or have any apologetic value in confirming religious truth claims. The definition of a true miracle has three basic elements that are reflected in the three words associated with miracles in the Bible: *power*, *sign*, and *wonder* (for more on these elements, see MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE).

The *power* of miracles comes from a God who is beyond the universe. The nature of miracles are that they are *wonders*, which inspire awe because they transcend natural laws. The word *sign* tells us the purpose of miracles: They confirm God’s message and messenger. The theological dimension of this definition is that miracles imply a God outside the universe who intervenes in it. Morally, because God is good, miracles produce and/or promote good. In their doctrinal dimension, miracles tell us which prophets are true and which are false. Teleologically (purposefully), miracles are never performed for entertainment. They have the purpose of glorifying God and directing people to him.

Pantheistic “miracles” don’t meet this definition because their power is not from God. New Age writer David Spangler identified the source of miracles for pantheists when he wrote, “Christ is the same force as Lucifer but moving in seemingly the opposite direction. Lucifer moves in to create the light within. . . . Christ moves out to release that light.” So the power for supernatural events in pantheism comes from Lucifer, or Satan, even though it is called Christ when it goes out from the individual.

From a biblical perspective, Lucifer, also called the Devil and Satan, is not the same as God or even equal to God. In the beginning, God created everything good: the earth (Gen. 1:1 , 31), humanity (Gen. 1:27–28), and angels (Col. 1:15 , 16). One angel was named Lucifer (Isa. 14:12). He was beautiful, but “lifted up with pride” (1 Tim. 3:6) and rebelled against God saying, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14). One-third of all the angels left their home with God to follow him (Rev. 12:4). These beings are now known as Satan and his demons (Rev. 12:7 and Matt. 25:41). They do have unusual powers, in the sense that all angels have supernatural powers as part of the spiritual world. They are said to be “working in [energizing] the sons of disobedience” (Eph. 2:2). Satan is able to “disguise himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) even to appear to be on God’s side, but it is only a disguise.

Miracles versus Magic. From a biblical perspective there are tests to distinguish miracles from New Age or occultic influences that might be called “magic.” Miracles are God-ordained supernatural interventions. Magic is supernatural manipulation of natural forces. The following chart summarizes these differences:

Miracles	Magic
Under God’s control.	Under human control.
Not available on command.	Available on command.
Supernatural power.	A supernatural power.
Associated with good.	Associated with evil.
Associated only with truth.	Associated also with error.
Can overpower evil.	Cannot overpower good.
Affirm Jesus is God in the flesh.	Denies Jesus is God in the flesh.
Prophecies always true.	Prophecies sometimes false.
Never associated with occult	Often associated with occult practices.

practices.

Magic uses occult means to perform its acts. These are practices which claim to conjure powers from the spirit realm. In many cases they do just that; but it is demonic power. Some practices directly linked to demonic power in the Bible are:

- Witchcraft (Deut. 18:10)
- Fortune-telling (Deut. 18:10)
- Communicating with spirits (Deut. 18:11)
- Mediums (Deut. 18:11)
- Divination (Deut. 18:10)
- Astrology (Deut. 4:19 ; Isa. 47:13–15)
- Heresy (false teaching) (1 Tim. 4:1 ; 1 John 4:1–3)
- Immorality (Eph. 2:2–3)
- Self-deification (Gen. 3:5 ; Isa. 14:12)
- Lying (John 8:44)
- Idolatry (1 Cor. 10:19–20)
- Legalism and self-denial (Col. 2:16–23 ; 1 Tim. 4:1–4)

Many who practice and teach pantheistic “miracles” admit that they use occult practices and recommend them for others. These tests clearly show that such claims to supernatural powers are not miracles.

Test Case: Jean Dixon. Jean Dixon is one of the twentieth century’s most celebrated psychics. She is alleged to have made many supernatural predictions, but her work in no sense meets the standards for the miraculous.

False Prophecies. Even her biographer, Ruth Montgomery, admits that Dixon has made false prophecies. “She predicted that Red China would plunge the world into war over Quemoy and Matsu in October of 1958; she thought that labor leader Walter Reuther would actively seek the presidency in 1964.” On October 19, 1968, she assured us that Jacqueline Kennedy was not considering marriage; the next day, Mrs. Kennedy wed Aristotle Onassis! She also said that World War III would begin in 1954, the Viet Nam war would end in 1966, and Castro would be banished from Cuba in 1970.

The People's Almanac (1976) did a study of the predictions of twenty-five top psychics including Dixon. The results: "Out of the total 72 predictions, 66 (or 92 percent) were dead wrong" (Kole, 69). Of those correct to some degree, two were vague and two hardly surprising—the United States and Russia would remain leading powers and there would be no world wars. It is clear that it does not take supernatural powers to get these subnormal results.

An accuracy rate around 8 percent could be explained by chance and general knowledge of circumstances. But there may be more to it. Montgomery tells us that Dixon uses a crystal ball, astrology, and telepathy, and that her gift of prophecy was given to her by a gypsy fortune-teller when she was a little girl.

The So-called Kennedy Prediction. Even Jean Dixon's highly reputed prophecy of John F. Kennedy's death is vague, and wrong in some aspects (she says that the 1960 election would be dominated by labor, which it was not), and said at one point that Richard Nixon would win, which he did not, a prediction she contradicted elsewhere. Her assassination prophecy did not specifically name Kennedy. In contrast, Isaiah named King "Cyrus" and told what he would do a century and a half before he was born (see Isa. 45:1). Second, Dixon gave no details as to how, where, or when Kennedy would be killed. Compare this with the specificity of Old Testament prophecies concerning the birth and death of the Christ (see Isaiah 53). Third, her prediction was general. All she divined was that a Democrat President would die in office. In 1960 there was about a 50–50 chance that a Democrat would be elected and, given two four-year terms, a fair chance that he would at least be shot at. Furthermore, the early 1960s fit a century-old cycle in which every twenty years a president died in office. The 1980 President, Ronald Reagan was almost assassinated.

The Bible allows no room for such things. All forms of divination are prohibited. No error is allowed for a prophet of God. Deuteronomy 18:22 says a prophet must be 100 percent accurate: "If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the LORD does not take place or come true, that is a message the LORD has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him" (Deut. 18:22). That last phrase means that it is appropriate to stone such a prophet. If God has spoken, it will come about. There is no need for a second chance.

Some claims to supernatural powers have been shown to be nothing more than illusions and sleight-of-hand tricks. Danny Korem, a professional magician who has written a book to expose such frauds, says, "given the proper circumstances, anyone can be made to believe he has witnessed something which never took place."

One example of this is the "psychic" Uri Geller, who claims to have the power to bend metal objects without touching them, as well as telepathy and clairvoyance. He even received support in a Stanford Research Institute report published in a popular-level science journal. But the editors of the magazine noted that the men who had refereed the tests felt that "insufficient account had been taken of the established methodology of experimental psychology. . . . Two referees also felt that the authors had not taken into account the lessons learned in the past by parapsychologists researching this tricky and complicated area." Their skepticism proved to be well founded. *New Science* magazine recorded that "at least five people claim to have seen Geller actually cheat." One woman observing him in a television studio said that "she actually

saw Geller bend—by hand, not by psychic powers—the large spoon." Another of Geller's tricks is to take his picture with a camera while the lens cap is on. But this has been duplicated by a photographer using a wide angle lens and with the cover not quite closed. Geller's success also seems to drop dramatically when the controls are tightened. On television shows, he liked to pick an object from one of ten film cans.

On the Merv Griffin show on US TV, Geller did the trick successfully, but some people thought they saw Geller jarring the table so that the cans would shake and he could tell which was heaviest. On the Johnny Carson Tonight show on 1 August 1973, therefore, special precautions were taken and Geller was not permitted to get near enough to the table to jar it or touch the cans. He failed.

It is hard to avoid the conclusion of one critic who said flatly that "the SRI paper simply does not stand up against the mass of circumstantial evidence that Uri Geller is simply a good magician." Magician Andre Kole enlightens us,

What most people do not realize about Uri Geller—what he has tried to suppress in his publicity—is that he studied and practiced magic as a youth in Israel. But he quickly realized that he attracted a far greater following by claiming paranormal powers than he did as a conjurer. In fact, most of what he does would be rather insignificant coming from a magician.

Unique Biblical Miracles. Biblical miracles are superior and unique. The magicians of Egypt tried to reproduce Moses' works by means of illusions with some success (Exod. 7:19ff.; 8:6ff.), but when God brought forth gnats from the dust, the sorcerers failed and exclaimed, "This is the finger of God" (Exod. 8:19). Elijah silenced all claims of the prophets of Baal when he called down fire from heaven when they could not (1 Kings 18). Moses' authority was vindicated when Korah and his followers were swallowed up by the earth (Numbers 16). Aaron was shown to be God's choice as priest when his rod budded (Numbers 17).

In the New Testament, Jesus healed the sick (Matt. 8:14–17), made the blind to see (Mark 8:22–26), cleansed lepers (Mark 1:40–45), and raised people from the dead (Luke 8:49–56). His pattern continued in the apostles, as Peter healed the beggar at the Temple gate (Acts 3:1–11) and raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36–41). Hebrews 2:4 tell us the purpose of these miracles: "God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will." As far as the purposefulness, goodness, and confirmation of God's message, there is no comparison between these miracles and bending spoons.

Unique Biblical Prophecy. Biblical prophecy is also unique in that, while most predictions are vague and often wrong, the Scriptures are remarkably precise and accurate (see PROPHECY, AS PROOF OF THE BIBLE). God foretold not only the coming of the destruction of Jerusalem (Isa. 22:1–25), but also the name of Cyrus, the Persian ruler who would return them (Isa. 44:28; 45:1). This was 150 years before it all happened. The very place of Jesus' birth is cited in about 700 B.C. (Micah 5:2). The time of his triumphal entry into Jerusalem was predicted accurately by Daniel in 538 B.C. (Dan. 9:24–26). No fortune-teller can boast of anything like this accuracy or consistency.

Christ predicted his own death (Mark 8:31), the means of his death (Matt. 16:24), his betrayal (Matt. 26:21), and his resurrection from the dead on the third day (Matt. 12:39–40). There is nothing like this anywhere in the occult prophecies or miracles. The prediction and resurrection of Jesus stands alone as *the* unique and unrepeatable event of history.

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Miracles, Myth and. Under the relentless attack from modern naturalism, many religious thinkers have retreated to the view that miracles are not events in the space-time world (*see* MIRACLE). Rather, miracles are myths or events in a spiritual world, above space and time. As a result, the religious records must be “demythologized” or divested of the mythological “husk” to get at the existential “kernel” of truth. Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) was at the forefront of this view of “miracles.” He adapted phenomenologist Martin Heidegger’s (1889–1976) concept of existential analysis to New Testament exegesis. Using Heidegger’s methods, he attempted to separate the essential gospel message from the first-century worldview.

Demythological Naturalism. Bultmann believed Scripture to be founded on a three-story universe, with the earth in the center, heaven above with God and angels, and the underworld beneath. The world “is the scene of the supernatural activity of God and his angels on the one hand, and of Satan and his demons on the other. These supernatural forces intervene in the course of nature and in all that we think and will and do” (Bultmann, 1). The New Testament documents needed to be stripped of this mythological structure. The language of mythology is incredible to moderns, for whom the mythical view of the world is obsolete. “All our thinking to-day is shaped for good or ill by modern science,” so “a blind acceptance of the New Testament . . . would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life” (ibid., 3–4).

With confidence, Bultmann did not even open for consideration the assumption that the biblical picture of miracles is impossible. Such a view could no longer be held seriously. The only honest way of reciting the creeds was to strip the mythological framework from the truth they enshrine.

Purpose of Myth. If the biblical picture is mythological, how then are we to understand it? For Bultmann “the real purpose of myth is not to present an objective picture of the world as it is, but to express man’s understanding of himself in the world in which he lives.” Therefore “myth should be interpreted not cosmologically, but anthropologically, or better still, existentially.”

“Myth speaks of the power or the powers which man supposes he experiences as the ground and limit of his world and of his own activity and suffering.” In other words, myth speaks of a transcendent power which controls the world. It is that hope that religion shares once its dated peripheral material is cut away (ibid., 10–11).

Bultmann concludes confidently, “Obviously [the resurrection] is not an event of past history . . . An historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable” (ibid., 38–39). He offers several reasons for this antisupernatural conclusion. First, there is “the incredibility of a mythical event like the resuscitation of a corpse.” Second, “there is the difficulty of establishing the objective historicity of the resurrection no matter how many witnesses are cited.” Third, “the resurrection is an article of faith which, as such, cannot be a miraculous proof.” Finally, “such a miracle is not otherwise unknown to mythology” (ibid., 39–40).

What then is the resurrection (*see* RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR)? For Bultmann, it is an event of subjective history, an event of faith in the hearts of the early disciples. As such, it is not subject to historical verification or falsification, for it is not an event in the space-time world. Christ did not rise from Joseph’s tomb; he arose by faith in the disciples’ hearts.

It is difficult to formulate precisely the reasoning Bultmann used to support this thesis. It seems to go like this:

1. Myths are by nature more than objective truths; they are transcendent truths of faith.
2. But what is not objective cannot be part of a verifiable space-time world.
3. Therefore, miracles (myths) are not part of the objective space-time world.

Weaknesses of Demythological Naturalism. Miracles Are Not Less Than Historical. It does not follow that, because an event is *more* than historical, it must be *less* than historical. Gospel miracles, to be sure, have a transcendent dimension. They are more than historical events. For example, the virgin birth involves the divine nature of Christ (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF) and the spiritual purpose of his mission as much as biology. It is presented as a “sign” (Isa. 7:14). The resurrection is more than the resuscitation of a corpse. Its divine dimension entails spiritual truths (Rom. 4:25 ; 2 Tim. 1:10).

That in no way means that these miracles are not purely objective and factual events. Even Bultmann admits that the New Testament writers believed the events they described were historical. “It cannot be denied that the resurrection of Jesus is often used in the New Testament as a miraculous proof. . . . Both the legend of the empty tomb and the appearances insist on the physical reality of the risen body of the Lord.” However, “these are most certainly later

embellishments of the primitive tradition” (ibid., 39). No solid reasons are given for concluding that these events could not be events in space-time history (*see* MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE).

Miracles in but not of the World. Bultmann wrongly assumes that any event *in* this world must be *of* this world. A miracle can originate in the supernatural world (its source) and yet occur in the natural world (its sphere). In this way the event can be objective and verifiable without being reducible to purely factual dimensions. One could verify directly by historical means whether the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth was raised and empirically observed (the objective dimensions of the miracle), without reducing the spiritual aspects of the event to mere scientific data. But in claiming that such miracles cannot occur in space-time history, Bultmann is merely revealing an unjustified and anti-intellectual naturalistic bias.

The basis of Bultmann’s antisupernaturalism is not evidential, nor even open to discussion. It is something he holds “no matter how many witnesses are cited” (ibid.). The dogmatism of his language is revealing. Miracles are “incredible,” “irrational,” “no longer possible,” “meaningless,” “utterly inconceivable,” “simply impossible,” and “intolerable.” Hence, the “only honest way” for modern people is to hold that miracles are spiritual and that the physical world is immune to supernatural interference.

If miracles are not objective historical events, then they are unverifiable and unfalsifiable. There is no factual way to determine if they are truth. They have been placed beyond the realm of objective truth and must be treated as purely subjective. Antony Flew’s criticism (*see* VERIFICATION, KINDS OF) was to the point when he challenged, “Now it often seems to people who are not religious as if there was no conceivable event or series of events the occurrence of which would be admitted by sophisticated religious people to be a sufficient reason for conceding ‘There wasn’t a God after all.’ ” Antony Flew asked: “What would have to occur or to have occurred to constitute for you a disproof of the love of, or of the existence of, God” (Flew, 98)?

To rephrase Flew’s questions for Bultmann, “If the corpse of Jesus of Nazareth had been discovered after the first Easter, would this falsify your belief in the resurrection?” Clearly for Bultmann it would not. The apostle Paul’s answer to that question, given in 1 Corinthians 15, is emphatically “Yes.” For “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins” (1 Cor 15:17).

If miracles are not historical events, they have no evidential value (*see* FIDEISM). They prove nothing, since they have value only for those who wish to believe them. However, the New Testament writers claim evidential value for miracles. They consider them “convincing proofs” (Acts 1:3) and not “cleverly devised myths” (2 Peter 1:16 RSV). Paul declared that “God has given proof of this to all men, by raising him [Jesus] from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

Conclusion. Bultmann’s demythological approach to miracles and the New Testament documents in general is unjustified. First and foremost, it is contrary to the overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament documents and the reliability of the

witnesses (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF). Secondly, it is contrary to the New Testament claim (2 Peter 1:16 , cf. John 1:1–3 ; 21:24). Finally, the New Testament is not the literary genre of mythology (*see* MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT). C. S. Lewis himself a writer of myth (fairy tales) keenly noted that “Dr. Bultmann never wrote a gospel.” He asks, therefore, “Has the experience of his learned . . . life really given him any power of seeing into the minds of those long dead [who have]?” As a writer of myth, Lewis found the critics usually wrong when they attempted to read his mind rather than his words. However, he adds, “the ‘assured results of modern scholarship,’ as to the way in which an old book was written, are ‘assured,’ we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can’t blow the gaff.” Bultmannian biblical critiques are unfalsifiable because, as Lewis wryly remarks, “. . . Mark is dead. When they meet St. Peter there will be more pressing matters to discuss” (*Christian Reflections*, 161–63).

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Miracles in the Bible. In the broad sense of the term *miracle* , every supernaturally caused event described in Scripture is miraculous. Scripture, however, also uses the concept in a narrower, more technical sense. In supernatural events of the past (and events predicted for the future), an unusual outward sign confirms a message from God.

Perhaps the definitive New Testament text on miracles is Hebrews 2:3–4 (κβν) : “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard [him]; God also bearing [them] witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?” Miracles are God’s way of accrediting his spokespersons. A miracle is an act of God that confirms the message as true, substantiates the sermon, and verifies the Word of God (*see* MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF).

When Korah challenged Moses’ divine authority, God confirmed Moses by opening up the earth to swallow Korah (Numbers 16). When Israel hesitated between the god Baal and *Yahweh* , God confirmed Elijah over the prophets of Baal by sending fire from heaven to consume the sacrifices. Elijah had prayed, “Let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant” (1 Kings 18:36).

In miracles Jesus was both confirmed and revealed. The religious ruler Nicodemus said to Jesus, “we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him” (John 3:2). Many people followed him because they saw the signs he performed on those who were sick (John 6:2). John said of Jesus’ first recorded miracle, “He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him” (John 2:11). John said he wrote about Jesus’ miracles “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31). The apostles were confident in proclaiming, “Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know” (Acts 2:22).

Miracles were apostolic credentials in the early church. Paul claimed that the signs of a true apostle were performed among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 12:12). He and Barnabas recounted to the apostles “the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them” (Acts 15:12).

Signs, Wonders, and Power. The Bible uses three basic words to describe a miracle: *sign*, *wonder*, and *power*. Each of the words carries a connotation that clarifies the complete picture of biblical miracles (*see* MIRACLE).

“Sign.” Although the Hebrew word for “sign” is sometimes used to refer to natural things such as stars (Gen. 1:14) or the Sabbath (Exod. 31:13), it usually carries supernatural significance, something appointed by God with a special message assigned to it (*see* MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF).

The first appearance of the concept comes in the divine prediction given to Moses that Israel would be delivered from Egypt to serve God at Horeb. God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you” (Exod. 3:12). When Moses asked God, “What if they do not believe me or listen to me?” the Lord gave two “signs”: Moses’ rod turned into a serpent (Exod. 4:3) and his hand became leprous (Exod. 4:1–7). These were given “that they may believe that the Lord, the God of their fathers . . . has appeared to you” (4:5). Moses performed the signs and the people believed (4:30–31). God gave further signs, the plagues, as a witness to the Egyptians “that I am the Lord, when I stretch out My hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it” (Exod. 7:3 , 5 ; cf. 11:9).

Repeatedly the purpose of the supernatural occurrence is given as a twofold “sign”: “By this you will know that I am the Lord” (Exod. 7:17 ; cf. 9:29–30 ; 10:1–2) and that these are “my people” (Exod. 3:10 ; cf. 5:1 ; 6:7 ; 11:7).

Several statements about signs appear in the context of God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt. God complained to Moses in the wilderness, saying, “How long will they refuse to believe in me, in spite of all the miraculous signs I have performed among them?” (Num. 14:11 ; cf. vs. 22). Moses challenged Israel: “Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders?” (Deut. 4:34). Moses reminded the people, “Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders—great and terrible—upon Egypt and Pharaoh and his whole household” (Deut. 6:22). “So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with

miraculous signs and wonders” (Deut. 26:8 ; cf. 29:2–3 ; Josh. 24:17 ; Neh. 9:10 ; Ps. 105:27 ; Jer. 32:20–21).

Throughout the Old Testament God performs miraculous “signs.” Signs confirm a prophet as God’s spokesman. As noted, Moses received miraculous credentials (Exodus 3 and 4). Gideon asked God, “give me a sign that it is really you talking to me” (Judg. 6:17). God responded with miraculous fire that consumed the offering (vs. 21). God confirmed himself to Eli by miraculous predictions about his sons’ deaths (1 Sam. 2:34). Predictive signs confirmed God’s appointment of King Saul (1 Sam. 10:7 , 9). Isaiah made predictions as signs of his divine message (Isa. 7:14 ; 38:22). Victories over enemies were called signs (1 Sam. 14:10). Signs affirmed healing (Isa. 38:7 , 22) and accompanied judgment (Jer. 44:29).

In the New Testament, *sign* (*semeion*) is used seventy-seven times (forty-eight times in the Gospels). It is occasionally used of ordinary events, such as circumcision (Rom. 4:11), and of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes (Luke 2:12). These signs have special divine significance. Most often the word is reserved for what we would call a miracle. It is used when Jesus healed (John 6:2 ; 9:16), turned water to wine (John 2:11), and raised the dead (John 11:47). Likewise, the apostles did miracles of healing (Acts 4:16 , 30), “great signs and miracles” (Acts 8:13), and “miraculous signs and wonders” (Acts 14:3 ; 15:12); for “many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Even the Jewish authorities said, “What are we going to do with these men? . . . Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle, and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16).

The word “sign” is also used of the most significant miracle in the New Testament, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. Jesus said that his unbelieving generation would see “the sign of the prophet Jonah.” As Jonah had been in a fish’s belly for three days, “the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:39–40). Jesus repeated this prediction of his resurrection when asked for a sign in Matthew 16:1 , 4 . Not only was the resurrection a miracle, but it carried with it a message from God (John 2:19).

“Wonder.” Often the words *signs* and *wonders* are used together in the Old Testament of the same event(s) (Exod. 7:3 ; cf. Deut. 4:34 ; 7:19 ; 13:1 , 2 ; 26:8 ; 28:46 ; 29:3 ; 34:11 ; Neh. 9:10 ; Ps. 135:9 ; Jer. 32:20–21). At other times the Bible describes as “wonders” events that are elsewhere called “signs”(Exod. 4:21 ; 11:9–10 ; Pss. 78:43 ; 105:27 ; Joel 2:30). Sometimes the word is used of a natural “wonder” (Ezek. 24:24) or a unique thing a prophet did to get his message across (Isa. 20:3). The word *wonder* usually has supernatural (divine) significance.

The Greek word *teras* means a “miraculous sign, prodigy, portent, omen, wonder” (Brown, 2:633). It carries with it the idea of that which is amazing or astonishing (*ibid.*, 623–25). In all sixteen of its New Testament occurrences, “wonder” is used in combination with the word “.” It describes Jesus’ miracles (John 4:48 ; Acts 2:22), the apostles’ miracles (Acts 2:43 ; 14:3 ; 15:12 ; Rom. 15:19 ; Heb. 2:3–4), Stephen’s miracles (Acts 6:8), and Moses’ miracles in Egypt (Acts 7:36). It connotes supernatural events before the second coming of Christ (Matt. 24:24 ; Mark 13:22 ; Acts 2:19).

“Power.” “Power” is sometimes used of human power in the Old Testament (Gen. 31:6 ; Deut. 8:17 ; Nahum 2:1). But often it is used of divine power, including God’s power to create: “God made the earth by his power” (Jer. 10:12 ; 27:5 ; 32:17 ; 51:15). The “power” of God overthrows his enemies (Exod. 15:6–7), delivers his people from Egypt (Num. 14:17 ; cf. vs. 13), rules the universe (1 Chron. 29:12), gives Israel their land (Ps. 111:6), and inspires the prophets (Micah 3:8). Power is often in direct connection with events called “signs” or “wonders” or both (Exod. 9:16 ; 32:11 ; Deut. 4:37 ; 2 Kings 17:36 ; Neh. 1:10). Sometimes Hebrew words denoting power are used in the same verse with “signs and wonders.” Moses speaks of the deliverance of Israel “by miraculous signs and wonders, . . . by a mighty hand” (Deut. 4:34 ; cf. 7:19 ; 26:8 ; 34:12).

“Power” (*dunamis*) is sometimes used in the New Testament to refer to human power (2 Cor. 1:8) or abilities (Matt. 25:15) or demonic powers (Luke 10:19 ; Rom. 8:38). Like its Old Testament parallel, the New Testament term is often translated “miracles.” *Dunamis* is used in combination with “sign and wonder” (Heb. 2:4), of Christ’s miracles (Matt. 13:58), of the virgin birth of Christ (Luke 1:35), of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 1:8), of the “power” of the gospel to save sinful people (Rom. 1:16), of the special gift of miracles (1 Cor 12:10), and of the power to raise the dead (Phil. 3:10). The emphasis of the word is on the *divine energizing* aspect of a miraculous event.

Biblical Nature of a Miracle. The three words Scripture uses to describe a miracle help delineate the meaning of miracles more precisely. Each of the three words for supernatural events (*sign* , *wonder* , *power*) delineates an aspect of a miracle. From the human vantage point, a miracle is an unusual event (“wonder”) that conveys and confirms an unusual message (“sign”) by means of unusual power (“power”). From the divine vantage point, a miracle is an act of God (“power”) that attracts the attention of the people of God (“wonder”) to the Word of God (by a “sign”).

The purposes of a miracle are

1. *to glorify* the nature of God (John 2:11 ; 11:40) ;
2. *to accredit* certain persons as the spokesmen for God (Acts 2:22 ; Heb. 2:3–4) ; and
3. *to provide evidence* for belief in God (John 6:2 , 14 ; 20:30–31).

Not all witnesses to a miracle believe. In this event the miracle is a witness against those who reject this evidence. John grieved: “Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him” (John 12:37). Jesus himself said of some, “They will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead” (Luke 16:31). One result, though not the purpose, of miracles is condemnation of the unbeliever (cf. John 12:31 , 37).

Biblical References to Miraculous. About 250 occurrences in Scripture fit the narrow definition of sign, wonder, or power. Since many references refer to multiple supernatural acts, the number of actual miraculous events is greater than the number of passages listed. Also, the

Bible often refers to single events combining many miracles. Ten lepers were healed (Luke 17:12–14), as were all or most of the sick in one city (Matt. 9:35).

Genesis

1	Creation of all things.
5:19–24	Translation of Enoch to be with God.
7:9–12 , 17–24	Noahic flood.
11:1 , 5–9	Judgment at tower of Babel.
12:10–20 ; 17:15–19 ; 18:10–14	Plagues on pharaoh for taking Abraham’s wife.
19:9–11	Sodomites blinded.
19:15–29	Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed.
19:24–26	Lot’s wife turned to salt.
21:1–8	Sarah’s conception of Isaac.

Exodus

3:1–15	The burning bush.
4:1–5	Moses’ staff becomes serpent and restored.
4:6–7	Moses’ hand becomes leprous and restored.
7:10–12	Aaron’s staff becomes serpent, which swallows serpents of sorcerers.
7:19–24	Water turned to blood.
8:5–7 ; 12–13	Frogs plague Egypt.
8:16–18	Lice plague Egypt.
8:20–24	Flies plague Egypt.
9:1–7	Egyptian cattle die of disease.
9:8–11	Boils on Egyptians and their animals.
9:22–26	Storm of thunder, hail, and fire.
10:3–19	Locusts plague Egyptians.
10:21–23	Plague of darkness covers Egyptians.
12:29–30	First-born Egyptian children and animals slain.
13:21–22	Pillar of cloud and fire lead Israel.
14:19–20	Angel protects Israel from Egyptians.
14:21–29	Sea parts so Israel can pass.
15:23–25	Bitter waters of Marah sweetened.
16:12–13	Quail cover camp of Israel.

16:14–15	Manna is provided for Israel to eat.
17:5–6	Water is provided from the rock.
17:8–16	Victory over Amalek.
19:16–18	Fire and smoke engulf Mount Sinai.
19:19–25	God answers Moses at Sinai.
20:1–17	God gives law.
Leviticus	
9:23–24	Fire consumes burnt offering.
10:1–7	Judgment upon Nadab and Abihu.
Numbers	
11:1–2	Fire consumes murmuring Israelites.
12:10–15	Miriam is made leprous and healed.
16:28–33	Judgment on Korah and rebels.
16:35	Fire consumes rebellious who offered incense.
16:46–48	Plague stopped by offering incense.
17:8	Aaron's rod buds.
20:7–11	Moses strikes the rock for water.
21:6–9	Healing with brass serpent.
22:21–35	Balaam's donkey speaks.
Joshua	
3:14–17	Waters of the Jordan divided.
5:13–15	Joshua's encounter with angelic being.
6	The fall of Jericho.
10:12–14	The sun stands still upon Gibeon.
Judges	
2:1–5	Angel of Lord appears to Israel.
3:8–11	Spirit of Lord comes upon Othniel.
3:31	Shamgar slays 600 with ox goad.
6:11–24	Angel appears to Gideon.
6:36–40	The sign of Gideon's fleece.
7:15–25	God delivers Midian to Gideon.
13:3–21	Angel appears to Manoah.
14:5–6	Samson slays lion.
15:14–17	Samson slays Philistines with jawbone of a donkey.

16:3	Samson carries away a city gate.
16:27–31	Samson causes collapse of temple of Dagon.
1 Samuel	
3:2–10	Voice of God calls Samuel.
5:1–5	Overturning of the god, Dagon.
5:6–12	Ashdod plagued by tumors.
6:19	God smites men of Beth-shemesh.
28:15–20	Samuel appears from dead to rebuke Saul.
2 Samuel	
6:6–7	Uzzah dies after touching ark.
1 Kings	
3:3–28	God gives Solomon great wisdom.
17:1	Three-year drought judges Israel.
17:2–6	Ravens feed Elijah.
17:8–16	Widow receives meal and oil.
17:17–24	Elijah raises widow's son.
18:17–38	Fire consumes Elijah's sacrifice on Carmel.
18:41–46	Elijah prays and God sends rain.
19:5–8	Elijah is fed by Angel.
2 Kings	
1:9–15	Fire from heaven consumes soldiers.
2:7–8	Elijah parts Jordan.
2:11	Elijah taken to heaven in chariot of fire.
2:13–14	Elisha parts Jordan.
2:19–22	Elisha cleanses waters at Jericho.
2:24	Youths killed by bears.
3:15–20	Ditches filled with water.
4:1–7	Widow's pots are filled with oil.
4:8–17	Shunammite woman bears a son.
4:32–37	Elisha raises dead son.
4:38–41	Elisha makes poison food edible.
4:42–44	One hundred fed with loaves and corn.
5:1–14	Naaman healed of leprosy.
5:27	Gehazi judged with leprosy.

6:5-7				Iron axe head floats on water.	8:16	1:32	4:40		Sick healed.
6:16-17				Vision of horses and chariots of fire.	8:2	1:40	5:12		Leper cleansed.
6:18				Syrian army struck with blindness.	9:2	2:3	5:18		Paralytic healed.
6:19-20				God opens eyes of Syrians.				5:9	Infirm man healed.
13:20-21				Dead man raised by contact with Elisha's bones.	12:9	3:1	6:6		Withered hand restored.
20:9-11				Ahaz's sundial turns backward.	12:15	3:10			Sick healed.
Job					8:5		7:1		Centurion's servant healed.
8-42:6				God speaks from whirlwind.			7:11		Widow's son returned to life.
Isaiah					12:22				Demon cast from blind mute.
1:1				Isaiah's vision concerning Jerusalem.	8:23	4:35	8:22		Storm stilled.
				Isaiah's vision of the Lord.	8:28	5:1	8:26		Demons cast out and enter herd of swine.
Ezekiel									
1				Ezekiel has a vision of God's glory.	9:18-23	5:22-35	8:40-49		Ruler's daughter raised.
Daniel					9:20	5:25	8:43		Woman with issue of blood healed.
2:26-45				Daniel recounts and interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream.	9:27				Blind men healed.
3:14-30				Deliverance from fiery furnace.	9:32				Demon cast from deaf mute.
5:5				Handwriting on wall.	14:13	6:30	9:10	6:1	Five thousand fed.
6:16-23				Daniel saved from lions.	14:25	6:48		6:19	Jesus walks on sea.
7:1-8:14				Daniel's visions.	14:36	6:56			Sick healed at Gennesaret.
9:20-27				Daniel's vision of seventy weeks.	15:21	7:24			Gentile man's daughter healed.
10:1-12:13				Daniel's further visions.		7:31			Deaf mute healed.
Jonah					15:32	8:1			Four thousand fed.
1:4-16				Storm from God stops fleeing Jonah.		8:22			Blind paralytic healed.
1:17				God's great fish swallows Jonah.	17:1-8	9:2-8	9:28-36		Jesus' transfiguration.
4:6				Gourd grows to shade Jonah.	17:14	9:17	9:38		Epileptic boy healed.
4:7				Worm destroys gourd.	17:24				Coin in fish's mouth.
4:8				God sends east wind.				9:1	Man born blind healed.
Matthew Mark Luke John Description									Demon-possessed, blind mute healed.
				2:1-11			11:14		Infirm woman healed.
				4:46			13:11		Man with dropsy healed.
		4:30		Jesus escapes mob.			14:1-4		Lazarus raised from dead.
		5:6		Catch of fish.				11:43	Ten lepers cleansed.
	1:23	4:33		Unclean spirit cast out.					
8:14	1:30	4:38		Peter's mother-in-law healed.			17:11		

20:30	10:46	18:35		Two blind men healed.
21:18	11:12			Fig tree withers.
		22:51		Servant's ear restored.
28	16:1-8	24	20	Jesus rises from dead.
28:1-7				Angel rolls stone away, announces resurrection.
28:5-8	16:5-7	24:4-8		Angel appears at grave.
			20:11-13	Angels appear to Mary.
	16:9		20:14-17	Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene.
28:9-10				Jesus appears to women.
	16:12	24:13-35		Jesus appears on road to Emmaus.
			20:19-23	Jesus appears to ten.
	16:14-18	24:36-48	20:26-31	Jesus appears to eleven.
			21:1-25	Jesus appears to seven.
			21:6	Miraculous catch of fish.
8:16-20	6:15-18			Jesus appears to the apostles.

Acts

1:3-5	Jesus appears and addresses apostles (Luke 24:49-51).
1:6-9	Jesus ascends into heaven.
1:10-11	Angels appear to apostles.
2:1-4	Holy Spirit comes on apostles.
2:4-13	Apostles speak in foreign tongues.
3:1-11	Peter heals lame man in temple.
5:5-10	Ananias and Sapphira die.
5:12	Signs and wonders by apostles.
5:18-20	Apostles released from prison.
7:55-56	Stephen sees Jesus with God.
8:7	Unclean spirits cast out.
8:13	Philip performs miracles and signs.
8:14-17	Samaritans receive Holy Spirit.
8:39-40	Philip caught away by Holy Spirit.
9:3-7	Jesus appears to Saul (cf. 1 Cor. 15:8).

9:10-16	Jesus appears to Ananias.
9:17-19	Saul's sight is restored.
9:32-34	Peter heals Aeneas.
9:36-42	Dorcas raised from dead.
10:1-8	Cornelius receives vision.
10:9-16	Peter receives vision three times.
10:44-48	Household receives Holy Spirit.
12:7-10	Angel releases Peter from prison.
12:23	Angel kills Herod.
13:8-11	Elymas the sorcerer blinded.
14:8-10	Paul heals lame man at Lystra.
16:16-18	Paul casts demon from young woman.
16:25-26	Earthquake opens prison doors.
18:9-10	Paul receives vision.
19:6	Ephesian believers receive Holy Spirit.
19:11-12	Paul performs unusual signs.
20:9-12	Eutychus restored to life.
23:11	Paul receives vision.
28:3-6	Paul protected from viper bite.
8:7-8	Paul heals the father of Publius.

1 Corinthians

15:6	Jesus appeared to five hundred.
5:7	Jesus appeared to James.

2 Corinthians

2:1-6	Paul's vision of heaven.
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Revelation

1:1-3:22	John's vision of Jesus.
4:1-22:21	John's vision of future.
6:12	Great earthquake.
6:12	Sun becomes black.
6:12	Moon becomes as blood.
6:13	Stars fall from heaven.
6:14	Mountains shaken from places.
8:7	Hail, fire, and blood fall.

8:8	Mountain is cast into the sea. Third of sea becomes blood.
8:9	Third of creatures in the sea die.
8:9	Third of ships destroyed.
8:10–11	Star falls and third of rivers and fountains become bitter.
8:12	Third of sun darkened.
8:12	Third of moon darkened.
8:12	Third of stars darkened.
9:1	Star falls from heaven.
9:2	Sun darkened by smoke from pit.
9:3–11	Plague of locusts.
9:18	Third of humanity killed.
11:5	Two witnesses destroy enemies by fire from their mouths.
11:6	Two witnesses stop rain.
11:6	Two witnesses turn water into blood.
11:6	Two witnesses call down plagues.
11:11	Two witnesses raised from dead.
11:12	Two witnesses ascend to heaven.
11:13	Earthquake destroys tenth of city.
11:19	Lightning, voices, thunder, earthquake and hail.
16:2	Sores on those who worship the beast.
16:3	Sea becomes as blood, and every soul in it dies.
16:4	Rivers, water sources become blood.
16:8	Sun scorches people.
16:10	Darkness covers kingdom of beast.
16:12	Euphrates River dries up.
16:18	Voices, thunders and earthquake.
16:20	Islands and mountains destroyed.
16:21	Stones fall on people.
18:1–24	Babylon falls.
19:11–16	Jesus Christ returns.
21:1	New heaven and earth appear.
21:10	New Jerusalem descends.

Old Testament Miracles. Negative Bible critics deny the authenticity of all miracles in the Bible. This conclusion is not based on a historical approach but on a philosophical one grounded in antisupernatural presuppositions. There are good grounds for accepting the authenticity of New Testament miracles. However, even some defenders of New Testament miracles have questioned the authenticity of some Old Testament accounts.

In a very popular book defending the possibility of miracles in general and New Testament miracles in particular, even apologist C. S. Lewis relegates many Old Testament miracles to the realm of myth. In *Miracles* he wrote:

My present view . . . would be that just as, on the factual side, a long preparation culminates in God's becoming incarnate as Man, so on the documentary side, the truth first appears in mythical form and then by a long process of focusing finally becomes incarnate as History. The Hebrews, like other peoples had mythology; but as they were the chosen people so their mythology was the chosen mythology. I take it that the memoirs of David's court come at one end of the scale and are scarcely less historical than St. Mark or Acts: and that the Book of Jonah is at the opposite end. [139]

There is no more reason to reject the authenticity of miracles in the Old Testament than to reject miracles in the New Testament. The evidence is of the same kind, reliable documents from contemporaries of the events. Indeed, the New Testament itself speaks of Old Testament miraculous events as historical.

General Evidence. We show, in related articles, why miracles are philosophically *possible* (see COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT ; MIRACLE ; MORAL ARGUMENT FOR GOD ; TELEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). An all-powerful, all-good personal God who created a world of personal creatures in his image can perform miracles. He will if he wishes to communicate with his finite creatures, for miracles are a crucial part of such a communication. Beginning with creation, which is the greatest miracle of all, Scripture reveals just such a God (see EVOLUTION, COSMIC ; KALAM COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT). Historical evidence argues persuasively that miracles occurred in the New Testament (see MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). Since both the God and redemptive plan of the Old Testament and New Testament are the same, there is every reason to expect that the miracles recorded in the Old Testament are authentic.

Evidence in Particular. Lewis' rejection of some Old Testament miracles is inconsistent, founded on faulty presuppositions, contrary to historical evidence, and not in accord with the New Testament use of the Old Testament.

It is based on a mistaken view of myth. Lewis' rejection of Old Testament miracles is based in an unsubstantiated view of myth (see MIRACLES, MYTH AND). According to Lewis, truth first appears as myth and then as history. Actually, the reverse has been the case, especially regarding pagan stories that gods appear on earth, die and then reappear in bodily form. It has been shown that these pagan myths probably copied Christ's death and resurrection rather than the reverse (see DIVINE BIRTH STORIES ; FRAZER, JAMES ; RESURRECTION CLAIMS IN NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS). Further, there is no indication in the Bible that God operates in such a manner. On the contrary, the Bible condemns myths (see 1 Tim. 1:3–4 ; 4:7 ; 2 Tim. 4:4). The whole concept

of myth becoming history is borrowed from an antinaturalistic critical view, which Lewis himself condemns (see, for example, *God in the Dock*, chap. 16).

It is contrary to Old Testament monotheism. Old Testament miracles fit the monotheistic concept of God that permeates the entire record. A theistic God (*see* THEISM) is a God beyond the world who created the world. Furthermore, since this theistic God loves what he has made, it is understandable that he would intervene on behalf of creatures in need. The fact that the Old Testament records miracles fits perfectly with its central message (*see* MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE).

It is inconsistent with the historical record. The Old Testament miracle stories are part of the same historical record as events known to be space-time history. There is absolutely no evidence that any manuscripts of these texts ever existed without the miracle accounts. They are present unmodified in the very oldest texts we possess. Rather, the miracles are an integral part of the history and message the Old Testament conveys. Remove miraculous events from Genesis 1–2 and the message about the Creator evaporates. The story of Noah and his faithfulness in a day of unbelief makes no sense apart from God’s intervention to save him and destroy the world by flood. Israel’s call of God and deliverance from Egypt are meaningless apart from the supernatural intervention to accomplish these things. The miracles of Elijah, Elisha, and Jonah are inseparable to the fabric of the history they record.

It is contrary to New Testament use of the Old Testament. New Testament references to Old Testament miracles assume their historical nature. The creation of the world is not only repeatedly cited in the New Testament but the events and persons involved are taken to be historical. Adam and Eve are referred to as historical figures many times in the New Testament (Matt. 19:4 ; 1 Cor. 11:8 , 9 ; 1 Tim. 2:13–14). In Romans 5:12 the inference is unmistakable: Through one man sin and death entered the world. In Luke 3:38 , Adam is listed in Jesus’ genealogy. Likewise, Adam is called “the first man Adam” in direct comparison to Christ who is the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45).

Supernatural events in the Old Testament are the bases for New Testament teaching. Jesus connected the truth of his resurrection with Jonah’s miraculous preservation in the belly of a great fish, saying, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt. 12:40). Given the context, it is inconceivable that Jesus meant: “Just as you believe that myth about Jonah, I would like to tell you about what will really happen at my death.” Jesus makes a similar connection between his return and the historical flood, saying, “ That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man ” (Matt. 24:39).

Jesus referred to numerous miraculous Old Testament events as historical, including creation (Matt. 19:4 ; 24:21), the miracles of Elijah (Luke 4:26), and the prophecies of Daniel (Matt. 24:15). In view of Jesus’ use of the Old Testament miracles, there is no way to challenge their authenticity without impugning his integrity. Accepting the New Testament as authentic, while rejecting Old Testament miracles, is inconsistent.

Summary. The biblical description of miracles uses three main words: *power* , *wonder* , and *sign* . These words designate the source (God’s power), the nature (wonderful, unusual), and the

purpose (to signify something beyond itself). A miracle is a sign to confirm a sermon; a wonder to verify the prophet’s words; a miracle to help establish the message (*see* MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF).

There are hundreds of miracle accounts in Scripture. Those in the New Testament particularly capture our attention, because they are well-attested and reveal Jesus Christ in his power over Satan, sickness, and the grave. The New Testament shows that the ongoing power of Christ was present in the young church. However, there is nothing more incredible or unbelievable about Old Testament miracles than about those in the New Testament. In fact, once the existence of a theistic God is granted, then all miracles become possible. As Lewis himself noted, “If we admit God must we admit miracle? Indeed, indeed, you have no security against it” (*Miracles*, 109). The greatest miracle of all—the resurrection of Christ—occurs in the New Testament. If this is historical, then there is no reason to reject the lesser miracles of Moses, Elijah, or Elisha.

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H. Lockyer, *All the Miracles in the Bible*

Miracles of Jesus. *See* MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE .

Missing Links, Evolutionary. Evolutionists believe in the common ancestry of all plants and animals, including humans. This theory of macro-evolution (*see* EVOLUTION ; EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL) entails the belief that all higher forms of life evolved from lower forms by small changes over multimillions of years. However, they acknowledge that the fossil record studied by paleontology does not reveal such a finely graded series of animal forms in the proper time sequences. These transitional fossils that should be in the ground but are not are called “missing links” in the evolutionary chain.

The father of modern evolution himself, Charles Darwin, recognized this as a serious problem when he wrote in *On the Origin of Species*: “Why then is not every geological formation and every stratum full of such intermediate links? Geology assuredly does not reveal any such finely graduated organic chain, and this, perhaps, is the most obvious and gravest objection which can be urged against my theory” (152). Of course, Darwin hoped that enough of these “missing links” would eventually be found to substantiate what he called the “theory of evolution” as opposed to the “theory of creation” (235, 435, 437).

In the century and a half since Darwin wrote (1859) millions of fossils have been unearthed. But the “missing links” needed to confirm his theory have not been found. In fact, some species thought to be transitional have been found not to be real transitional fossils after all, so that the record is actually more bleak today than in Darwin’s time! Harvard paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould has confessed that “The extreme rarity of transitional forms in the fossil record persists as the trade secret of paleontology. The evolutionary trees that adorn our textbooks have data only at the tips and nodes of their branches; the rest is inference, however reasonable, not the evidence of fossils” (Gould, 14).

Niles Eldredge agrees, reasoning that, “expectation colored perception to such an extent that the *most obvious single fact about biological evolution — non-change* —has seldom, if ever, been incorporated into anyone’s scientific notions of how life actually evolves. If ever there was a myth, it is that evolution is a process of constant change” (Eldredge, 8).

Gould frankly acknowledged that the history of most fossil species includes two features particularly inconsistent with gradualism:

Stasis. Most species exhibit no directional change during their tenure on earth. They appear in the fossil record looking much the same as when they disappear; morphological change is usually limited and directionless.

Sudden appearance. In any local area, a species does not arise gradually by the steady transformation of its ancestors. It appears all at once, “fully formed” (Gould, 13–14). So, it is fair to say that the evolution theory, as Darwin conceived of it, has not been verified by the only source of real evidence of what actually happened, the fossil record.

Explanation of “Missing Links.” Although the failure to find “missing links” has disappointed evolutionists, few have given up the theory for lack of them. Rather, they respond in various ways:

Some transitional fossils exist to support evolution, so perhaps others will be found. Horse fossils are cited as an example of an existing fossil series.

A tiny fraction of all the animals that ever lived have been preserved in fossils. And only a very small fraction of all fossils have been unearthed. So, we should not expect that many “missing links” will be found.

By their nature transitional fossils were few. This adds to their rarity.

Many species had soft parts that perished easily and would not have been preserved.

Many evolutionists favor a view called “punctuated equilibrium,” which contends that evolution occurred more rapidly than previously thought. There are leaps in the fossil record. Evolution, they claim, is more like a ball bouncing up a staircase than one rolling up a hill.

Crucial links have been found between primates and human beings. These include Neanderthals, Peking Man, Australopithecus, Lucie, and others.

Response to Missing-Link View. Responses of creationists to these defenses of evolutionary theory follow several lines of reasoning.

Even if a finely graded series of fossils were found, so that there were fewer missing pieces in the progression, this would not prove evolution. Similarity and progress do not necessarily prove common ancestry; they may be evidence of a common Creator. Evolutionists sometimes speak of the evolution of the airplane or of the car, from simple to later more complex models. However, neither the car nor the airplane evolved by natural forces producing small changes over a long period of time. In both cases there was intelligent interference from the outside that created a new model similar to previous ones. These illustrations actually support the creationist model of a common Designer, rather than an evolutionary common ancestor.

This leads to another problem: Different life forms can be similar outwardly or even in the basic components of their genetic code, yet be part of entirely different systems. Just as it requires intelligence to create *King Lear* from selected words of the language, so it also requires intelligence to select and sort genetic information to produce a variety of species that fit together in a biosystem.

Also, the genetic code of one form of life differs from another the way Henry Ford’s Model T differs from a Mercedes. There are basic similarities, but they are quite different systems. And systemic changes must appear simultaneously for the system to work; they cannot be gradual. That is, the whole new system must come into existence as a functioning whole. But simultaneous, systematic change in an already functioning organism is consistent with creation, not evolution. One can make small changes in a car gradually over time without changing its basic type. Changes can be made in the shape of the fenders, its color, and its trim gradually. But if a change is made in the size of the pistons, this involves simultaneous changes in the cam shaft, block, cooling system, engine compartment, and other systems. Otherwise the new engine will not function (Denton, 11). Likewise, changing a fish to a reptile or a reptile to a bird involves major, simultaneous changes in every biological system of the animal. Gradual evolution cannot account for this. The same applies to the far more complex system of the genetic code.

The very concept of “missing link” begs the question in favor of evolution. The analogy envisions a chain with some breaks. The true picture can only be described as a few links with a *missing chain*. There are gigantic “gaps” between the major types of life at every “level” of the alleged evolutionary hierarchy. However, the whole analogy of a chain assumes a “chain” of evolution was there, and that there are missing “links” to be found. This superimposes an analogy in favor of evolution on the fossil record, rather than examining what is actually in the fossil record. An unbiased study of this record reveals, not sections of a chain, but different basic forms, which appear suddenly, simultaneously, fully formed and functioning, reproducing their kind, and remaining basically unchanged throughout their geological history. This evidence points to an intelligent creator.

There are fewer transitional fossils today than in Darwin's day. For many things thought to be transitional turned out not to be. The evolution of the horse is a case in point. Even evolutionists acknowledge that the alleged progression is not a continuous transformational series. There is a devolution in some cases (e.g., the number of ribs in the earlier Eohippus is 18 and the later Orohippus is 15). Likewise the number of ribs in the earlier Pliohippus is 19 while the later Equus Scotti is 18. Even most evolutionists have given this up as a proof of evolution. The smallest (dog-sized) animal in the series (Eohippus) is not a horse but a rock badger.

Among the few alleged "missing links" found, Coelacanth (a sturdy fin fish from the Devonian Period) is not half-fish and half-reptile. It is 100 percent fish. None were ever found with feet evolving on them. In fact, they have been found alive today and look identical to those in the fossil record of some 60 million years ago. Likewise, Archaeopteryx is not half bird and half reptile. Other ancient birds had teeth as it does. Some current birds, such as the ostrich, have claws in their wings. Archaeopteryx has perfectly formed feathers and wings—something necessary for flight. Neither are simple tool-making primates proof of evolution. Even some birds and seals use things as tools. Primates, however, did not make space rockets or computers.

Discovery of so-called "missing links" between primates and humans does not support macro-evolution (see LUBENOW).

Logically, the physical similarities among the species does not prove common ancestry. An alternative explanation is that they have a common Creator, who designed them to live in similar environments. Genetics is the only way to prove linkage. Unfortunately, there is no way to reconstruct the genetic structure of bones uncovered. It is what is "under the hood" that counts. And the gap between a primate and human brain is immense. And this gap does not refer merely to the size of the brain but to its complexity and ability to create art, human language, and highly complex mechanisms.

Further, some of the bones once widely touted as transitional species are now known not to have been, even by evolutionists. Piltdown Man, a basic form in science texts and museums for years, turned out to be a fraud. Nebraska Man was a reconstruction from one tooth, which turned out to be that of an extinct pig. Yet Nebraska Man was used as evidence in the Scopes Trial (1925) to support teaching evolution in public schools. The fossil evidence for Peking Man vanished. Some question its validity, based on studies before the pieces of bone disappeared. One serious problem is that this creature was killed by a sharp object, a highly unlikely cause of death for a prehuman. Even some evolutionists believe Australopithecine was an orangutan. Not one primate fossil find to date that has been subjected to objective scientific scrutiny is a strong candidate for the human family tree. Despite alleged genetic differences, Neanderthals had a larger brain capacity than modern man and evidence of religious ritual, characteristics normally associated with rational and moral beings. With this history, there is reason to question other fragmentary finds. The bent posture of Piltdown has been traced to a bone deformity resulting from a vitamin deficiency cave-dwellers experience from lack of sunlight.

Even if other primates *morphologically* similar to human beings are uncovered, this will not mean that they were *spiritually* the same. Behind the human form and shape is a human mind and soul (see IMMORTALITY). The human person has reflective self-consciousness unique to

itself, and it has language, with its grammatical rule-oriented structure. What is more, humans have religious consciousness and practices; primates do not. All attempts to show physical similarities between primates and human beings as a basis for evolution overlook the gigantic gulf between the animal kingdom and a human being created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27).

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Mithraism. Some contemporary critics of Christianity argue that this religion is not based in divine revelation but was borrowed from mystery religions, such as Mithraism. Muslim author Yousuf Saleem Chishti attributes such doctrines as the deity of Christ and the atonement to the pagan teachings of the Apostle Paul and the doctrine of the Trinity to pagan formulations of the church Fathers.

Pagan Source Theory. Chishti attempts to demonstrate a vast influence of mystery religions on Christianity, stating, "The Christian doctrine of atonement was greatly coloured by the influence of the mystery religions, especially Mithraism, which had its own son of God and virgin Mother, and crucifixion and resurrection after expiating for the sins of mankind and finally his ascension to the 7th heaven." He adds, "If you study the teachings of Mithraism side by side with that of Christianity, you are sure to be amazed at the close affinity which is visible between them, so much so that many critics are constrained to conclude that Christianity is the facsimile or the second edition of Mithraism" (Chishti, 87).

Chishti lists some similarities between Christ and Mithra: Mithra was considered the son of God, he was a savior, he was born of a virgin, he had twelve disciples, he was crucified, he rose from the grave the third day, he atoned for the sins of humankind, and he returned to his father in heaven (ibid., 87–88).

Evaluation. An honest reading of the New Testament data shows that Paul did not teach a new religion or draw on existing mythology. The foundation stones for Christianity are patently taken from the Old Testament, Judaism generally, and the life of a historical figure named Jesus.

Jesus and the Origin of Paul's Religion. A careful study of Epistles and Gospels reveals that the source of Paul's teachings on salvation was the Old Testament and the teachings of Jesus. A simple comparison of both Jesus' and Paul's teachings will demonstrate the point.

Both taught that Christianity fulfilled Judaism. Paul, similar to Jesus, taught that Christianity was a fulfillment of Judaism. Jesus declared: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). Jesus added, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law" (Luke 16:16–17).

The Christ of Paul and Jesus is utterly at home in Judaism and foreign to the mystery cults. Paul wrote to the Romans: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4). He added in Colossians, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col. 2:16–17).

Christianity taught that humans are sinful. Both Paul and Jesus taught that human beings are sinners. Jesus declared: "I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them" (Mark 3:28). He added in John, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins" (John 8:24).

Paul declared that all human beings are sinful, insisting that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). He added in Ephesians, "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins" (Eph. 2:1). Indeed, part of the very definition of the Gospel was that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3).

Christianity taught that blood atonement is necessary. Both Jesus and Paul insisted that the shed blood of Christ was necessary as an atonement for our sins (see CHRIST, DEATH OF). Jesus proclaimed: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). He added at the Last Supper, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28).

Paul is just as emphatic. He affirmed that "In him [Christ] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Eph. 1:7). In

Romans he added, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8). Referring back to the Old Testament Passover, he said, "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Christianity emphasized Christ's resurrection. Jesus and Paul also taught that the death and burial of Jesus was completed by his bodily resurrection (see RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR ; RESURRECTION, PHYSICAL NATURE OF). Jesus said, "He told them, 'This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day' " (Luke 24:46). Jesus challenged, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days. . . . But the temple he had spoken of was his body" (John 2:19 , 21).

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22 ; cf. 20:25–29).

The apostle Paul also stressed the need of the resurrection for salvation. To the Romans he wrote: "He [Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Rom. 4:25). Indeed, Paul insisted that belief in the resurrection was essential to salvation, writing, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

Christianity taught salvation is by grace through faith. Jesus affirmed that every person needs God's grace. Jesus' disciples said to him, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:25–26). All through the Gospel of John Jesus presented only one way to obtain God's gracious salvation: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life" (3:36 ; cf. 3:16 ; 5:24 ; Mark 1:15).

Paul taught salvation by grace through faith, affirming, "It is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8–9 ; cf. Titus 3:5–7). He added to the Romans, the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (4:5).

A comparison of the teachings of Jesus and Paul on salvation reveals clearly that there is no basis for speculating on any source of Paul's teachings other than that of Jesus. Christianity was rooted in Judaism, not in Mithraism. Indeed, Paul's message of the gospel was both checked and approved by the original apostles (Gal. 1–2), demonstrating official recognition that his message was not opposed to that of Jesus (see Habermas, 67–72). The charge that Paul corrupted Jesus' original message was long ago answered by J. Gresham Machen in his classic work, *The Origin of Paul's Religion* and F. F. Bruce, *Paul and Jesus* .

Origin of the Trinity. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity does not have a pagan origin. Pagan religions were polytheistic and pantheistic , but trinitarians are monotheists (see THEISM). Trinitarians are not tritheists who believe in three separate gods; they are monotheists who believe in one God manifested in three distinct persons.

Though the term *Trinity* or its specific formulation does not appear in the Bible, it faithfully expresses all the biblical data. An accurate understanding of the historical and theological

development of this doctrine amply illustrates that it was exactly because of the dangers of paganism that the Council of Nicea formulated the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. For a brief treatment of the history of this doctrine see E. Calvin Beisner, *God in Three Persons*. Two classics in this field are G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, and J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*.

Mithraism and Christianity. From the foregoing it is evident that Judaism and the teachings of Jesus were the origin of Christianity. It is equally clear that Mithraism was not. Chishti's descriptions of this religion are baseless. In fact he gives no reference for the similarities he alleges.

Unlike Christianity (see NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF), Mithraism is based in myth. Ronald Nash, the author of *Christianity and the Hellenistic World*, writes:

We do know that Mithraism, like its mystery competitors, had a basic myth. Mithra was supposedly born when he emerged from a rock; he was carrying a knife and torch and wearing a Phrygian cap. He battled first with the sun and then with a primeval bull, thought to be the first act of creation. Mithra slew the bull, which then became the ground of life for the human race. [Nash, 144]

Christianity affirms the physical death and bodily resurrection of Christ. Mithraism, like other pagan religions, has no bodily resurrection. The Greek writer Aeschylus sums up the Greek view, "When the earth has drunk up a man's blood, once he is dead, there is no resurrection." He uses the same Greek word for "resurrection," *anastasis*, that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15 (Aeschylus, *Eumenides*, 647). Nash notes:

Allegations of an early Christian dependence on Mithraism have been rejected on many grounds. Mithraism had no concept of the death and resurrection of its god and no place for any concept of rebirth—at least during its early stages. . . . During the early stages of the cult, the notion of rebirth would have been foreign to its basic outlook. . . . Moreover, Mithraism was basically a military cult. Therefore, one must be skeptical about suggestions that it appealed to nonmilitary people like the early Christians. [ibid.]

Mithraism flowered after Christianity, not before, so Christianity could not have copied from Mithraism. The timing is all wrong to have influenced the development of first-century Christianity (ibid., 147; see MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT).

Conclusion. All the allegations of Christian dependence on Gnostic or mystery religions (see NAG HAMMADI GOSPELS) have been rejected by the scholars in biblical and classical studies (ibid., 119). The historic character of Christianity and the early date of the New Testament documents did not allow enough time for mythological developments. And there is a complete lack of early historical evidence to support such ideas. The British scholar Norman Anderson explains:

The basic difference between Christianity and the mysteries is the historic basis of the one and the mythological character of the others. The deities of the mysteries were no

more than "nebulous figures of an imaginary past," while the Christ whom the apostolic *kerygma* proclaimed had lived and died only a few years before the first New Testament documents were written. Even when the apostle Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians the majority of some five hundred witnesses to the resurrection were still alive. [Anderson, 52–53]

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Modalism. Modalism is an unorthodox or heretical view of God that denies the orthodox trinitarian view that there are three distinct, co-eternal persons in the godhead (see TRINITY). Modalists claim that God simply manifests himself in different modes or forms at different times. Unfortunately, some illustrations used by trinitarians tend toward a modalistic concept of God. For example, modalists claim that God is like water, which can be manifested in one of three different modes at different times: liquid, gas, or solid.

Better illustrations are more appropriate to trinitarianism. They show that God is simultaneously a plurality within a unity, since he is three distinct persons in one eternal nature. God is like one triangle (his nature), which has three corners (his persons). In this illustration the three and one are simultaneous, not successive. Without three sides there is no triangle. Further, each corner differs from the others, yet all share in the nature of a triangle. Or God is like 13 (1 x 1 x 1 = 1). Here too there are three and one at the same time. It is not one manifest at three different times in three differing ways.

In modalism there is one person in the godhead. In this sense, modalism is more like the traditional monotheism of Islam, rather than trinitarian theism. In the Trinity, three distinct persons unite in one eternal nature.

Both trinitarianism and modalism are in contrast to tritheism, which affirms that there are three gods ($1 + 1 + 1 = 3$). This is a form of polytheism. Like trinitarianism it has three different persons, but unlike trinitarianism, it believes three separate beings are each a god, with an individual nature. Orthodox trinitarians hold that God has only one nature, but that three distinct persons, co-eternal and co-equal, share this same nature (see bibliography under TRINITY).

Molinism. *Molinism* is a view of the relation between God's grace and human free will, emanating from the Spanish Jesuit theologian Luis de Molina (1535–1600). Molina asserted that God has a special kind of foreknowledge of human free acts, which are the basis of God's gracious gift of salvation. Molinism was widely adopted by Jesuits and opposed by Dominicans. After examination by a special congregation in Rome (1598–1607), both views were allowed in Catholic schools.

An Exposition of Molinism. According to Molinism, God has three kinds of knowledge: natural, middle, and free (Craig, *The Only Wise God*, 131).

Natural knowledge is God's knowledge of all possible worlds. This knowledge is essential to God. It is concerned with the necessary and the possible.

Free knowledge is God's knowledge of this actual world. After a free act of his will, God knows these things absolutely, but such knowledge is not essential to God.

Middle knowledge or *scientia media* is the distinctive of Molinism. God cannot know future free acts in the way he knows other things. God knows some things absolutely, but future free acts are known only contingently. "God, from a most profound and inscrutable comprehension of every free will in His essence, has intuited what each, according to its innate liberty, would do if placed in this or that condition" (Garrigou-Lagrange, *The One God*, 460; see FREE WILL). Unlike natural knowledge, this middle or intermediate knowledge is in some sense dependent on what free creatures choose to do. God's omniscience "waits" to see what a free creature does "before" he selects those who will be saved. Since God is eternal, the sequence is only logical, not chronological.

Arguments for Middle Knowledge. Argument from three states of affairs. One argument for *scientia media* is that there are three kinds of knowledge in God because there are three possible states of affairs. Between the merely possible and the necessary there is the contingent (free). Since God knows all future states, it follows that he must know them in the way in which they are (as three). Future free acts are contingent. God must know future free acts by way of an intermediate knowledge that is neither necessary nor merely possible, but is contingent on the way free creatures will choose.

Argument from the order of knowing. Logically, an event must occur before it can be true. It must be true before God can know it is true. God cannot know as true what is not yet true. Hence, God must wait (from a logical standpoint) the occurrence of free acts before he can know they are true.

Argument from the nature of truth. Truth corresponds to reality. God cannot know anything as true unless it actually has occurred. Since future free acts have not actually occurred, God's knowledge of them is dependent on their occurrence. Since their occurrence is contingent, God's knowledge of them is contingent.

Avoiding fatalism. A fourth argument is that middle knowledge is the only way to avoid fatalism. Theological fatalism holds that all things are predetermined necessarily, including what we call "free acts." But if we are truly free, then some things do not happen necessarily but contingently, upon free choices. But if some events are contingent, God's knowledge of them cannot be necessary. God must know what will be freely chosen to occur.

In addition, Molinists see great benefits to their view in explaining predestination, God's providence, the problems of evil (see EVIL, PROBLEM OF), and even hell. "In the logical moment prior to creation, God had no idea how many would be saved and how many lost," according to one supporter (Craig, *Ibid.*, 145–46). With regard to predestination, "the very act of selecting a world to be created is a sort of predestination. The person in that world who God knew would respond most certainly will respond and be saved. . . . Of course, if they were to reject his grace, God's middle knowledge would have been different. . . . As for the unsaved, the only reason they are not predestined is that they freely reject God's grace" (*ibid.*, 136). The cost of having a certain number of elect is to have a certain number who will be lost. God so ordered things providentially that those who are lost would not have chosen Christ in any case (*ibid.*, 148, 150).

Biblical Arguments for Molinism. Biblical arguments for Molinism are based on passages such as 1 Samuel 23:6–13 and Matthew 11:20–24. God knew that if David were to remain in the city, Saul would come to kill him. So if God's answers through the ephod are taken to be simple foreknowledge, his knowledge was false. What was predicted did not happen. Only if the answers are taken as what would happen under certain freely chosen circumstances were they true. This would indicate that God had contingent knowledge of them. In Matthew 11 Jesus asserts that the ancient cities he mentions would have repented if they had seen Jesus' miracles. But this makes sense only if God's knowledge is contingent on what they would have done.

Evaluation. Molinism assumes that God must "wait" to know things are true. But God is eternal, and an eternal perspective knows things "before" they occur in time. God knows things in eternity, not in time. All things preexist in their ultimate cause (God). So God knows things in himself from all eternity. He does not have to "wait" to know them.

Truth is correspondence to reality. But the reality to which God's knowledge corresponds is his own nature, by which he eternally and necessarily knows all things as they preexist in him. God's knowledge is not dependent on waiting for the effect to occur in time. The effect preexists most eminently in its Cause, so God knows all things that will happen most perfectly in himself "before" they happen in time.

God's Knowledge Is Not Contingent. God's knowledge is not dependent on the conditions of the object known. If what God knows is contingent, then he must know it contingently. But since God is a Necessary Being, he must know everything in accordance with his own nature,

necessarily. Since God is eternal, all of his knowledge is intuitive, eternal, and necessary. Since his being is independent, and he must know in accord with his independent nature, it follows that God's knowledge is not dependent in any way.

Fatalism Is Not Necessary. Molinism is not the only alternative to fatalism. God can have *necessary* knowledge of *contingent* acts. He can know for sure what will happen freely. Just because he has certainty about an event does not mean that it does not occur freely. The same event can be necessary from the vantage point of God's knowledge and free from the standpoint of human choice (*see* DETERMINISM , FREE WILL). If God is omniscient, then he knows everything, including the fact that Judas would betray the Christ. If Judas had not betrayed Christ, God would have been wrong about what he knew. But that does not mean Judas was coerced. For God knew certainly that Judas would betray Christ freely. Just as prerecorded television news segments are of events that cannot be changed but were freely chosen, so God in his omniscience sees the future with the same certainty with which he sees the past.

One can hold the same solution to theological mysteries without being a Molinist. God's knowledge of the future can be necessary without any event being forced. The mysteries of predestination and providence are explained better by denying any contingency in God's knowledge of them, since fatalism does not follow from denying Molinism (*see* DETERMINISM ; FREE WILL).

That God knows what people would have done under different conditions is not inconsistent with his knowledge being necessary. He simply knew with necessity what would have happened if people had chosen differently.

Evaluation. Thomists and Calvinists have strongly opposed Molinism as a denial of both the independence and grace of God.

According to Thomism, God is Pure Actuality; he has no passive potency at all (*see* ANALOGY, PRINCIPLE OF ; ARISTOTLE ; GOD, NATURE OF ; THOMAS AQUINAS). If God had potency he would need a cause. But since he is the ultimate cause of all things, God is without potency (*see* GOD, NATURE OF). If Molinism is correct, then God is the passive recipient of the knowledge of free acts. God's "middle knowledge" is dependent on the events actually occurring. The great "I Am" becomes the "I Can Be." This implies a passivity that God as Pure Actuality cannot have. Hence, Molinism is contrary to the nature of God.

God Becomes an Effect. Another statement of the difficulty is that either God's knowledge is completely causal, determining all events, or it is determined by these events. There is no third alternative. Molinists say that God's knowledge is determined by future free acts. This sacrifices God as ultimate Cause. He is determined by events, not Determiner. This is contrary to the nature of God, for he becomes an epistemological spectator (*ibid.*, 107).

Efficacious Grace Is Denied. Another objection is that Molinism denies God's efficacious grace in salvation. All that God wills comes to pass without our freedom being infringed upon. "He wills efficaciously that we freely consent and we do freely consent" (*ibid.*, 401). Only in this way can God's grace be efficacious. God is the active Author of salvation (*ibid.*, 398). As

Aquinas says, "If God's intention is that this man, whose heart he is moving, shall receive sanctifying grace, then that man receives grace infallibly." God's intention cannot fail, and the saved are saved infallibly (*certissime* , says Augustine; *ibid.*, 111).

While agreeing on the efficacious nature of grace, Thomists part company with strong Calvinists at this point. For Thomists, free creatures retain the power to choose not to follow God when God graciously and efficaciously moves them to choose according to his predetermined will. Strong Calvinists teach that this movement by the Holy Spirit in the Heart of the person choosing is irresistible. If it is God's will, that person *will* respond because the Spirit quickens the heart. Thomists insist that, "far from forcing the act, far from destroying . . . freedom, the divine motion instead actualized . . . freedom. When efficacious grace touches the free will, that touch is virginal, it does no violence, it only enriches" (*ibid.*, 110). However, this is not essential to the anti-Molinist view. God's knowledge could be determinative of a free act without his causing the free act himself. This view was held by the early Augustine and moderate Calvinists (*see* Geisler).

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Monism. The study of reality is metaphysics. How reality is viewed is worldview. Fundamental to a person's worldview is whether they see the "one or many." This difference separates monists from pluralists and is so imbedded in the person's thought patterns that he or she seldom is aware that such a difference in viewpoint actually exists. Monism sees all as "one." God and the universe are one thing. Christianity is committed to the "many" of pluralism, holding that God differs from creation (*see* THEISM).

The Case for Monism. Monism, in contrast to all forms of pluralism, insists that all reality is one. Parmenides of Elea (b. ca. 515 B.C.) initially posed, or identified, the problem, and many

philosophers since have grappled with his dilemma. Four answers have been proposed, but only one successfully solves the problem.

Parmenides argued that there cannot be more than one thing (*absolute monism*). If there were two things, they would have to differ. But for things to differ, they must differ by being or by nonbeing. Being is what which makes them identical, so they cannot differ by that. Nor can they differ by nonbeing, for nonbeing is nothing, and to differ by nothing is not to differ at all. Hence there cannot be a plurality of beings. There is only one single, indivisible being.

Alternatives to Monism. Basically, there are four alternatives to monism. Aristotelianism, Thomism, *Atomism* and *Platonism* , the latter two affirm that the many beings differ by nonbeing. Aristotelianism and Thomism hold that the many beings differ by being.

Things Differ by Absolute Nonbeing. With the generation of philosophers following Parmenides came the atomists, such as Leucippus and Democritus, who contended that the principle which separates one being (atom) from another is absolutely nothing (i.e., nonbeing). They called it the void. Being is full and nonbeing is an empty void. Atoms do not differ at all in their essence, but they are separated by different space. This difference, however, is merely extrinsic. There is no intrinsic difference in the atoms (beings). This answer was scarcely adequate. To differ by absolutely nothing is to have absolutely no difference. Whether the no difference is in one location or another makes no difference. To have absolutely no difference is to be absolutely the same. Monism wins the day over atomism.

Things Differ by Relative Nonbeing. Plato believed that things differ because differing forms or archetypes lie behind them. These ideas or forms, are the reality. All things in this world of our experience are only shadows of the real world. They have meaning because they participate in the true forms. For example, each individual human being participates in the universal form of humanness in the world of ideas.

Plato saw the weakness of his view and tried to escape by modifying it to the explanation that the forms or ideas are not indivisibly and unrelatably separated by absolute nonbeing; rather, they are related by *relative* nonbeing.

This relative nonbeing was also called the “other” (Plato, *Sophist*, 255d). Plato believed he could have many different forms (beings) and thus avoid monism. Each form differed from other forms in that it was not that other form.

All determination is by negation. A sculptor determines what the statue is in relation to the stone by chipping away what is unwanted. The finished form is other than what the sculpture would have been if different chips lay at the sculptor’s feet. Likewise, each form is differentiated from every other form by what is not there. The chair is distinguished from everything else in the room in that it is *not* the table. It is *not* the floor or the wall, etc. The chair is not absolutely nothing. It has *chairness* in itself. But it is nothing in relation to other things, because it is not those other things.

Parmenides would not have been impressed by Plato’s attempt. He would have asked whether there was any difference in the beings themselves. If not, then he would have asserted that all these beings (forms) must then be identical. There are not many beings but only one.

Things Differ as Simple Beings. Both the atomist and Platonist took one horn of the Parmenidian dilemma. They tried to differentiate things by nonbeing. Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas sought to find a difference in the beings themselves. Both contended that beings are essentially different. Aristotle held that these beings are metaphysically simple (Aristotle, IX, 5, 1017a 35b-a). Thomas Aquinas viewed them as metaphysically composite.

See the article ARISTOTLE for the full argument that there is a plurality of forty-seven or fifty-five unmoved movers that are separate from one another in their very being. This plurality of beings causes all motion in the world, each from its own cosmic domain. Each is a pure form with no matter. Matter differentiates things in this world. This plurality of totally separated substantial forms has no commonness or community of being. The movers are completely diverse, one from another. They cannot be related (see Eslick, 152–53).

Parmenides would ask Aristotle how simple beings can differ in their very being. Things composed of form and matter can differ in that one particular matter differs from all other matter, even though they have the same form. But how do pure forms (beings) differ? Here is no principle of differentiation. If there is no difference in their beings, their being is identical. Aristotle’s solution does not avoid monism.

Thomism: Things Differ as Complex Beings. The fourth pluralistic alternative to Parmenidean monism is represented by Thomas Aquinas, who with Aristotle, sought difference within beings themselves. But unlike Aristotle, who began with simple beings, Aquinas believed that all finite beings are compositions. Only God is an absolutely simple Being, and there can be only one such Being (God). However, there can be other kinds of being, namely, composed beings. Beings differ in their very being because there can be different kinds of beings (Aquinas, 1a. 4, 1, ad 3). God, for example, is an infinite kind of being. All creatures are finite kinds of beings. God is pure actuality; all creatures are composed of both actuality and potentiality. Hence, finite things differ from God in that they have a limiting potentiality; he does not. Finite things can differ from each other in whether their potentiality is completely actualized (as in angels) or whether it is being progressively actualized (as in human beings). But in all creatures their essence (whatness) is really distinct from their existence (isness). God’s essence and existence are identical. Aquinas was not the first to make this distinction, but he was the first to make such extensive use of it.

Aquinas argues in his book *On Being and Essence* that existence is something other than essence except in God, whose essence is his existence. Such a being must be one and unique, since multiplication of anything is only possible where there is a difference. But in God there is no difference. It follows necessarily that in everything else, except this one unique existence, existence must be one thing and essence another.

This answered the dilemma posed by monism. Things do differ in their being because they are different kinds of beings. Parmenides was wrong because he assumed that “being” is always

understood univocally (the same way). Aquinas saw that being is analogous (see ANALOGY, PRINCIPLE OF). This means each being can be understood in similar but different ways. All beings that exist are the same in that they are all *actual* . Finite beings differ from the one infinite Being in that they have differing potentialities to become other things, or to cease being. And they have differing actualizations of those individual potentials.

Superiority of the Thomistic Position. Aquinas' view has value both in its own rationality and in the implausibility of its alternatives. Parmenides' position does violence to our experience of a differentiated, yet interrelated, multiplicity of beings.

The *Thomistic* position on plurality is that multiplicity is possible because each thing has its own mode of *be -ing*. Essence, the principle of differentiation, is real. This is not to say that essence is independent of existence. Essence is real *because* it exists. The real distinction within being between essence (*essentia*) and existence (*esse*) seems to be the only satisfactory answer to the Parmenidian problem of unity and plurality. Without an analogy of being, there is no way to account for multiplicity.

Parmenides saw no multiplicity because he saw all being univocally. Things are either totally unrelated or totally identical. There was no middle ground. If all being is univocal, then all being is identical. There is no room for distinction; it is all one Being. This is why the monistic worldview lacks any possibility of a Creator-creature distinction. It is why monistic religions view the ultimate hope as becoming submerged into "god." Everything else is nonbeing. The only way to avoid the monistic conclusion which follows from either an equivocal or a univocal view of beings is to take an analogical view. And the only way being can be analogical is if there is within being both the principle of unification *and* the principle of differentiation. Since finite beings have different potentialities (essences), these finite beings can be differentiated in reality when these potentialities are actualized or brought into existence in different kinds of being.

Conclusion. Being is that which is. How many beings are there? Being can be either simple (pure actuality) or complex (actuality and potentiality). There cannot be two absolutely simple beings, since there is nothing in a completely simple being by which it could differ from another. A simple being must, however, differ from complex beings, since it has no potentiality and they do. This is the Creator-creature distinction. It is why there can be only one pure and simple God, but many created beings that mix actuality and potency or potentiality. Only one *is* Being; everything else *has* being. This appears to be the only adequate answer to monism.

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Monotheism. See THEISM ; ISLAM ; MONOTHEISM, PRIMITIVE .

Monotheism, Primitive. The Bible teaches that monotheism was the earliest conception of God. The very first verse of Genesis is monotheistic: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob reflect an early monotheism. Job, the only other biblical book that is set in an ancient pre-Mosaic period, clearly has a monotheistic view of God (see, for example, Job 1:1 , 6 , 21). Romans 1:19–25 teaches that monotheism preceded animism and polytheism and that these forms of religion resulted as people sinfully exchanged the glory of God for "images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

Monotheism, Early or Late? Frazer's Late Monotheism. Since James Frazer published *The Golden Bough* (1912) it has been widely believed that religions evolved from animism through polytheism to henotheism and finally monotheism. Even before this Charles Darwin set the stage for such an evolutionary scheme. Frazer alleged that Christianity copied pagan myths. In spite of its selective use of anecdotal data, that have been outdated by subsequent research, the book still holds wide influence, and its ideas are assumed true. Frazer's evolutionary thesis of religion actually is without foundation, as is noted in the article on his work.

Arguments for Early Monotheism. There is substantial evidence to support the work of Schmidt (see Schmidt) that monotheism is the primitive belief about God. Arguments for a primitive monotheism come from the earliest records and traditions that have survived. These include not only the Bible, but also the Ebla Tablets and studies of preliterate tribes. Genesis represents the oldest records of the human race, going back to the first man and woman. Archaeologist William F. Albright has demonstrated that the Genesis patriarchal record is historical. "Thanks to modern research," he wrote, "we now recognize its [Scripture's] substantial historicity. The narratives of the patriarchs, of Moses and the exodus, of the conquest of Canaan, of the judges, the monarchy, exile and restoration, have all been confirmed and illustrated to an extent that I should have thought impossible forty years ago" (*From the Stone Age to Christianity* , 1).

Genesis is both a literary and genealogical work, tied together by a listing of family descendants (Genesis 5 , 10) and the literary formula: "this is the history [or account] of." The phrase is used throughout Genesis (2:4 ; 5:1 ; 6:9 ; 10:1 ; 11:10 , 27 ; 25:12 , 19 ; 36:1 , 9 ; 32:2). What is more, events from every one of the disputed first 11 chapters of Genesis are referred to by Jesus and New Testament writers as historical. This includes the existence of Adam and Eve (see Matt. 19:4–5), the temptation (1 Tim. 2:14) and fall (Rom. 5:12), the sacrifices of Cain and Abel (Heb. 11:4), the murder of Abel by Cain (1 John 3:12), the birth of Seth (Luke 3:38), the translation of Enoch to heaven (Heb. 11:5), marriage before the flood, the flood and

destruction of humanity (Matt. 24:39), preservation of Noah and his family (2 Peter 2:5), the genealogy of Shem (Luke 3:35–36), and the birth of Abraham (Luke 3:34).

There is strong evidence for the historicity of Adam and Eve in particular. Yet this record reveals that these first persons were monotheists (Gen. 1:1 , 27 ; 2:16–17 ; 4:26 ; 38:6–7).

Behind Genesis, Job is the oldest biblical book, yet this too reveals a monotheistic view of God. God is the personal (Job 1:6 , 21), moral (1:1 ; 8:3–4), yet sovereign (42:1–2) and almighty (5:17 ; 6:14 ; 8:3 ; 13:3) Creator (4:17 ; 9:8–9 ; 26:7 ; 38:6–7).

Aside from the Bible, the oldest relevant records come from *Ebla* in Syria. They reveal a clear monotheism, declaring, “Lord of heaven and earth, the earth was not, you created it, the light of day was not, you created it, the morning light you had not made exist” (Pettinato, *The Archives of Ebla*, 259).

Primitive religions of Africa unanimously reveal an explicit monotheism. John Mbiti studied three hundred traditional religions. “In all these societies, without a single exception, people have a notion of God as the Supreme Being” (see *African Religions and Philosophy*). This is true of primitive religions around the world. Even in polytheistic societies, a high god or sky god reflects a latent monotheism.

The idea of a late, evolved monotheism is itself late, only gaining popularity in the wake of Charles Darwin and his theory of biological evolution (see *On the Origin of Species* , 1859). The idea was stated by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* (1871). Frazer’s evolutionary idea in religion is based on several unproven assumptions. Among them, it assumes that biological evolution is true, though it lacks support (see EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL). Even if biological evolution were true, there is no reason to believe evolution would be true of religion.

Frazer’s evolution of monotheism thesis also is based on fragmentary and anecdotal evidence, not a serious historical and chronological search for origins of monotheism. It fits evidence around an evolutionary model. The evidence can be explained as well, if not better, if polytheism were a degeneration from original monotheism. Paganism is a falling away from the primitive monotheism. Albright acknowledges that “high gods may be all-powerful and they may be credited with creation of the world; they are generally cosmic deities who often, perhaps usually, reside in heaven” (*From the Stone Age* , 170). This clearly runs counter to the animistic and polytheistic conceptions.

Conclusion. There is no real reason to deny the biblical account of an early monotheism. On the contrary, there is every evidence that monotheism was the first religion, from which others devolved, just as Romans 1:19–25 declares. This better fits the evidence of the existence of a monotheistic God (see GOD, EVIDENCE FOR) and the proven tendency of human beings to distort the truth God reveals to them (see NOETIC EFFECTS OF SIN).

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Moral Argument for God. Most arguments for the existence of God, such as the cosmological argument and teleological argument, are from the ancient world. The ontological argument comes from medieval times. But the moral argument has modern ancestry, emanating from the works of Immanuel Kant.

Kant’s Moral Postulate. Kant strongly rejected traditional arguments for God’s existence (see GOD, OBJECTIONS TO PROOFS FOR). He did not, however, reject belief in God. Rather, he believed that God’s existence is a practically (morally) necessary *postulate* , even though we cannot *prove* it.

Kant’s argument from practical reason for God’s existence, from his *Critique of Practical Reason* , can be stated:

1. Happiness is what all human beings desire.
2. Morality (viz., categorical imperative) is the duty of all human beings (what they ought to do).
3. The unity of happiness and duty is the greatest good (the *summum bonum*).
4. The *summum bonum* ought to be sought (since it is the greatest good).

NTCERK *New Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*

5. But the unity of desire and duty (which is the greatest good) is not possible by finite human beings in limited time.
6. And the moral necessity of doing something implies the possibility of doing it (ought implies can).
7. Therefore, it is morally (i.e., practically) necessary to postulate: (a) a Deity to make this unity possible (i.e., a power to bring them together), and (b) immortality to make this unity achievable.

A simpler form goes:

1. The greatest good of all persons is that they have happiness in harmony with duty.
2. All persons should strive for the greatest good.
3. What persons ought to do, they can do.
4. But persons are not able to realize the greatest good in this life or without God.
5. Therefore, we must postulate a God and a future life in which the greatest good can be achieved.

Kant never offered his postulate as a *theoretical proof* for God. He did not believe such proof to be possible. Rather, he viewed God's existence as a morally necessary presupposition, not the result of a rationally necessary argument.

Kant's premises are challenged. Existentialists, including Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus and atheists such as Friedrich Nietzsche challenged the assumption that the greatest good is achievable. Although they lived before Kant, Martin Luther and John Calvin, with other Protestant Reformers, denied that ought implies can. Still others, from Aristotle forward, believed the greatest good is achievable in this life.

Rashdall's Moral Argument. Hastings Rashdall did what Kant never attempted when he offered a rational argument for the existence of God from the moral law. Beginning with the objectivity of the moral law, he reasoned to an absolutely perfect moral Mind (see Hick, 144–52).

1. An absolutely perfect moral ideal exists (at least psychologically in our minds).
2. An absolutely perfect moral law can exist only if there is an absolutely perfect moral Mind: (a) Ideas can exist only if there are minds (thoughts depend on thinkers). (b) And absolute ideas depend on an absolute Mind (not on individual [finite] minds like ours).
3. Hence, it is rationally necessary to postulate an absolute Mind as the basis for the absolutely perfect moral idea.

In support of the objectivity of the absolute moral idea Rashdall offers this reasoning:

1. Morality is generally understood as objectively binding.
2. Mature minds understand morality as being objectively binding (i.e., binding on all, not just some).
3. Moral objectivity is a rationally necessary postulate (because something cannot be judged as better or worse unless there is an objective standard of comparison).
4. Objective moral ideals are practically necessary to postulate.

If an objective moral law exists independent of individual minds, then it must ultimately come from a Mind that exists independently of finite minds. It is rationally necessary to postulate such a Mind in order to account for the objective existence of this moral law.

The most common ways to challenge this argument are to question the existence of an objective moral law, and to deny that an absolute moral ideal would need an absolute moral Mind. Why cannot a finite mind conjure up the idea of moral perfection without there being any in the real world. After all, cannot we think of perfect triangles without there being one?

Sorley's Moral Argument. The moral argument is dependent on the objectivity of the moral law. Hence, it is necessary to offer a defense of this premise. This is precisely what W. R. Sorley does in his version of the moral argument for God's existence. Since there exists a moral ideal prior to, superior to, and independent of all finite minds, there must be a supreme moral Mind from which this moral ideal is derived:

1. There is an objective moral law that is independent of human consciousness of it and that exists in spite of human lack of conformity to it: (a) Persons are conscious of such a law beyond themselves; (b) Persons admit its validity is prior to their recognition of it; (c) Persons acknowledge its claim on them, even while not yielding to it; (d) no finite mind completely grasps its significance; (e) all finite minds together have not reached complete agreement on its meaning, nor conformity with its ideal.
2. But ideas exist only in minds.
3. Therefore, there must be a supreme Mind (beyond all finite minds) in which this objective moral law exists.

Sorley draws attention to an important difference between a natural law and this moral law. The former is descriptive of the universe, while the latter is prescriptive of human behavior. Hence, the moral law cannot be part of the natural world. It is the way humans ought to act. It is beyond the natural world and is the way we should behave in the world.

Critics of Sorley's form of the moral argument claim that simply because persons *believe* there is a moral law beyond them and independent of them, does not mean it *really* is. Following

Feuerbach, they believe that such a law is only a projection of human imagination. It is a collective ideal of human consciousness (or unconsciousness), which conjures up the best from human nature as an ideal by which we should live. Critics also point to differences in understanding of morals as an indication that there is no one universal moral law but merely a collection of different human ideals that overlap and are thereby confused as one moral law. Finally, critics challenge the premise that only a supreme, extrahuman Mind can be the basis for this universal moral ideal. Perfect ideas can be created by imperfect minds, they say.

Trueblood's Moral Argument. Evangelical philosopher Elton Trueblood adds significantly to the moral arguments proposed by Rashdall and Sorley in his form of the argument:

1. There must be an objective moral law; otherwise: (a) There would not be such great agreement on its meaning. (b) No real moral disagreements would ever have occurred, each person being right from his own moral perspective. (c) No moral judgment would ever have been wrong, each being subjectively right. (d) No ethical question could ever be discussed, there being no objective meaning to any ethical terms. (e) Contradictory views would both be right, since opposites could be equally correct.
2. This moral law is beyond individual persons and beyond humanity as a whole: (a) It is beyond individual persons, since they often sense a conflict with it. (b) It is beyond humanity as a whole, for they collectively fall short of it and even measure the progress of the whole race by it.
3. This moral law must come from a moral Legislator because: (a) A law has no meaning unless it comes from a mind; only minds emit meaning. (b) Disloyalty makes no sense unless it is to a person, yet people die in loyalty to what is morally right. (c) Truth is meaningless unless it is a meeting of mind with mind, yet people die for the truth. (d) Hence, discovery of and duty to the moral law make sense only if there is a Mind or Person behind it.
4. Therefore, there must be a moral, personal Mind behind this moral law.

It is noteworthy that Trueblood's form of the moral argument argues its validity in terms of its rationality. It reasons, in essence, that to reject the moral law is irrational or meaningless. That is, unless we assume the universe is irrational, there must be an objective moral law and, thereby, an objective Moral Law Giver.

In addition to the things said against the other forms of the moral argument, some critics, especially existentialists and nihilists, simply point to the absurdity of the universe. They simply refuse to assume, with Trueblood, that the universe is rational. They admit that it may be meaningless to assume there is no moral law, but add quickly that this is the way things are—meaningless. Of course, the defender of the moral argument could point to the self-defeating nature of the claim that “Everything is meaningless,” since that very statement is assumed to be meaningful.

Lewis' Moral Argument. The most popular modern form of the moral argument was given by C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*. He not only gives the most complete form of the argument in the most persuasive way, but he also answers major objections. The moral argument of Lewis can be summarized:

1. There must be a universal moral law, or else: (a) Moral disagreements would make no sense, as we all assume they do. (b) All moral criticisms would be meaningless (e.g., “The Nazis were wrong.”). (c) It is unnecessary to keep promises or treaties, as we all assume that it is. (d) We would not make excuses for breaking the moral law, as we all do.
2. But a universal moral law requires a universal Moral Law Giver, since the Source of it: (a) Gives moral commands (as lawgivers do). (b) Is interested in our behavior (as moral persons are).
3. Further, this universal Moral Law Giver must be absolutely good: (a) Otherwise all moral effort would be futile in the long run, since we could be sacrificing our lives for what is not ultimately right. (b) The source of all good must be absolutely good, since the standard of all good must be completely good.
4. Therefore, there must be an absolutely good Moral Law Giver.

The Moral Law Is Not Herd Instinct. Lewis anticipates and persuasively answers major objections to the moral argument. Essentially, his replies are:

What we call the moral law cannot be the result of herd instinct or else the stronger impulse would always win, but it does not. We would always act *from* instinct rather than selflessly to help someone, as we sometimes do. If the moral law were just herd instinct, then instincts would always be right, but they are not. Even love and patriotism are sometimes wrong.

The Moral Law Is Not Social Convention. Neither can the moral law be mere social convention, because not everything learned *through* society is *based* on social convention. For example, math and logic are not. The same basic moral laws can be found in virtually every society, past and present. Further, judgments about social progress would not be possible if society were the basis of the judgments.

The Moral Law Differs from Laws of Nature. The moral law is not to be identified with the laws of nature. Nature's laws are descriptive (is), not prescriptive (ought) as are moral laws. Factually convenient situations (the way it *is*) can be morally wrong. Someone who tries to trip me and fails is wrong, but someone who accidentally trips me is not.

The Moral Law Is Not Human Fancy. Neither can the moral law be mere human fancy, because we cannot get rid of it even when we would like to do so. We did not create it; it is impressed on us from without. If it were fancy, then all value judgments would be meaningless, including such statements as “Hate is wrong.” and “Racism is wrong.” But if the moral law is not a description or a merely human prescription, then it must be a moral prescription from a Moral

Prescriber beyond us. As Lewis notes, this Moral Law Giver is more like Mind than Nature. He can no more be part of Nature than an architect is identical to the building he designs.

Injustice Does Not Disprove a Moral Law Giver. The main objection to an absolutely perfect Moral Law Giver is the argument from evil or injustice in the world. No serious person can fail to recognize that all the murders, rapes, hatred, and cruelty in the world leave it far short of perfect. But if the world is imperfect, how can there be an absolutely perfect God? Lewis' answer is simple: The only way the world could possibly be imperfect is if there is an absolutely perfect standard by which it can be judged to be imperfect (see MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF). For injustice makes sense only if there is a standard of justice by which something is known to be unjust. And absolute injustice is possible only if there is an absolute standard of justice. Lewis recalls the thoughts he had as an atheist:

Just how had I got this idea of *just* and *unjust*? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line. What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust. . . . Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did that, then my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended on saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies. Thus in the very act of trying to prove that God did not exist—in other words, that the whole of reality was senseless—I found I was forced to assume that one part of reality—namely my idea of justice—was full of sense. [*Mere Christianity* , 45, 46]

Rather than disproving a morally perfect Being, the evil in the world presupposes a perfect standard. One could raise the question as to whether this Ultimate Law Giver is all powerful but not whether he is all perfect. For if anyone insists there is real imperfection in the world, then there must be a perfect standard by which this is known.

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Morality, Absolute Nature of. Orthodox Christianity has always defended moral absolutes. However, most modern ethicists hold some form of relativism. Thus, it is necessary to defend the belief in moral absolutes.

Moral Absolutes. Before the absolute nature of morality can be understood, morality must be defined. Several things are meant by a moral obligation. First, a moral duty is good in itself (an *end*), not merely good as a means. Further, it is something we *ought* to pursue, a duty. Morality is *prescriptive* (an “ought”), not merely descriptive (an “is”). Morality deals with what is right, as opposed to wrong. It is an obligation, that for which a person is accountable.

An absolute moral obligation is:

an *objective* (not subjective) moral duty—a duty for all persons.

an *eternal* (not temporal) obligation—a duty at all times.

a *universal* (not local) obligation—a duty for all places.

An absolute duty is one that is binding on all persons at all times in all places.

Defense of Absolutes. Moral absolutes can be defended by showing the deficiency of moral relativism. For either there is a moral absolute or else everything is morally relative. Hence, if relativism is wrong, then there must be an absolute basis for morality.

Everything is relative to an absolute. Simply by asking, “Relative to what?” it is easy to see that total relativism is inadequate. It can't be relative to the relative. In that case it could not be relative at all, ad infinitum, since there would be nothing to which it was relative, etc. Albert Einstein did not believe everything was relative in the physical universe. He believed the speed of light is absolute.

Measurement is impossible without absolutes. Even moral relativists make such statements as, “The world is getting better (or worse).” But it is not possible to know it is getting “better” unless we know what is “Best.” Less than perfect is only measurable against a Perfect. Hence, all objective moral judgments imply an absolute moral standard by which they can be measured.

Moral disagreements demand objective standards. Real moral disagreements are not possible without an absolute moral standard by which both sides can be measured. Otherwise both sides of every moral dispute are right. But opposites cannot both be right. For example, “Hitler was an evil man” vs. “Hitler was not an evil man” cannot both be true in the same sense (see FIRST PRINCIPLES). Unless there is an objective moral standard by which Hitler's actions can be weighed, we cannot know that he was evil.

Moral absolutes are unavoidable. Total moral relativism reduces to statements such as “You should never say never,” “You should always avoid using always,” or “You absolutely ought not believe in moral absolutes.” “Ought” statements are moral statements, and “ought never” statements are absolute moral statements. So, there is no way to avoid moral absolutes without affirming a moral absolute. Total moral relativism is self-defeating.

Distinctions in Moral Absolutes. If there is an absolute basis for morality, then why do so many believe that all morality is relative? The reasons for this are mostly based on the failure to make proper distinctions.

Difference between Fact (Is) and Value (Ought). Relativists confuse fact and value, what is and what ought to be. What people *do* is subject to change, but what they *ought* to do is not. There is a difference between sociology and morality. Sociology is *descriptive*; morality is *prescriptive*. Relativists confuse the changing factual situation with unchanging moral duty.

Difference between Value and Instance of Value. There is confusion as well between an absolute moral value and changing attitudes regarding whether a given action violates that value. Once witches were sentenced as murderers, but now they are not. What changed was not the moral principle that murder is wrong. Rather, our understanding changed about whether witches really murder people by their curses. One's factual understanding of a moral situation is relative, but the moral values involved in the situation are not.

Difference between Values and Understandings. A similar misunderstanding is over the difference between an unchanging *value* and a changing *understanding* of that value. A couple deeply in love better understand their love after twenty years. The love itself has not changed. Their understanding of it has changed.

Difference between End (Value) and Means. Often moral relativists confuse the *end* (the value itself) with the *means* to attaining that value. Most political disputes are of this sort. Both liberal and conservative politicians agree that justice should be done (the end); they merely disagree as to whose program is the best means to attain justice. Both militarists and pacifists desire peace (the end); they simply disagree as to whether a strong military best attains this peace.

Difference between Command and Culture. Another important difference, often overlooked by moral relativists, is that between the absolute moral command and the relative way a culture can manifest it. All cultures have some concept of modesty and propriety in greeting. In some a kiss is appropriate, while in others such intimacy would horrify. *What* should be done is common, but *how* it should be done differs. Failure to make this distinction misleads many to believe that because a value differs among cultures, the value itself (*what*) differs.

Difference between Applications. A legitimate discussion to decide *which* value applies to a given situation is not the same as a discussion over *whether* there is an absolute value. For example, we err if we think that anyone who believes a pregnant woman has the right to an abortion places no value on human life. They simply do not believe that the unborn are truly human beings. This debate is vastly important, but it should not miscommunicate the notion that the absolute good of protecting life is the issue on the floor. The issue is whether the unborn are human persons (see Geisler, chapter 8).

Conclusion. Moral absolutes are unavoidable. Even those who deny them use them. The reasons for rejecting them are often based on a misunderstanding or misapplication of the moral absolute, not on a real rejection of it. That is, moral values are absolute, even if our understanding of them or the circumstances in which they should be applied are not.

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Muhammad, Alleged Bible Predictions of. Muhammad (570–632) claimed to be the last of the prophets of God, the culmination of God's prophetic words to humankind, the seal of the prophets (Sura 33:40). In a well-known *hadith*, Muhammad states his uniqueness this way: "I have been given permission to intercede; I have been sent to all mankind; and the prophets have been sealed with me" (Schimmel, 62). What he spoke was later written in the *Qur'an* which is considered by Muslims to be the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God. As the last prophet, Muhammad superseded Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and others as the prophet of God.

Islamic apologetics has followed several lines of reasoning for proving the finality of Muhammad over the previous prophets. The chief of these proofs are:

1. that the Old and New Testaments contain clear prophecies about him;
2. that Muhammad's call to be a prophet was miraculous (*see* MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED DIVINE CALL OF);
3. that the language and the teaching of the *Qur'an* are without a parallel (*see* QUR'AN, ALLEGED DIVINE ORIGIN OF);
4. that Muhammad's miracles are a seal on his claims (*see* MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED MIRACLES OF), and
5. that his life and character prove him to have been the last and the greatest of prophets (*see* MUHAMMAD, CHARACTER OF).

Biblical Predictions. In a popular Muslim book, *Muhammad in the Bible*, Abdu L-Ahad Dawud argues that the Bible predicts the coming of the prophet Muhammad. He claims that "Muhammad is the real object of the Covenant, and in him alone are actually and literally fulfilled all the prophecies in the Old Testament" (11). He examines the New Testament, finding Muhammad, not Christ, to be the foretold prophet. The texts Dawud and other Muslims use to support these claims include:

Deuteronomy 18:15–18. God promised Moses, "I will raise up for them [Israel] a prophet like you from among their brothers; I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them

everything I command him” (vs. 18). Muslims believe this prophecy is fulfilled in Muhammad, as the *Qur’an* claims when it refers to “The unlettered Prophet [Muhammad], Whom they find mentioned in their own (Scriptures), in the Law and the Gospels” (sura 7:157).

However, this prophecy could not be a reference to Muhammad. First, it is clear that the term “brothers” means fellow Israelites. The Jewish Levites were told in the same passage that “They shall have no inheritance among their brothers” (vs. 2). Since the term “brothers” refers to Israel, not to their Arab antagonists, why would God raise up for Israel a prophet from their enemies? Elsewhere in Deuteronomy the term *brothers* also means fellow Israelites, not foreigners. God told the Jews to choose a king “from among your own brothers,” not a “foreigner” (Deut. 17:15). Israel never chose for herself a non-Jewish king, though the foreign Herodian kings were forced upon Israel by Rome.

So Muhammad came from Ishmael, as Muslims admit, and heirs to the Jewish throne came from Isaac. According to the Torah, when Abraham prayed “If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!” God answered emphatically, “But my covenant I will establish with Isaac” (Gen. 17:18 , 21). Later God repeated, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned” (Gen. 21:12). The *Qur’an* itself states that the prophetic line came through Isaac, not Ishmael: “And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob, and We established the Prophethood and the Scripture among his seed” (sura 29:27). The Muslim scholar Yusuf Ali adds the word *Abraham* and changes the meaning as follows, “We gave (Abraham) Isaac and Jacob, and ordained Among his progeny Prophethood And Revelation.” By adding Abraham, the father of Ishmael, he can include Muhammad, a descendent of Ishmael, in the prophetic line! But Abraham’s name is not found in the Arabic text of the *Qur’an* , which Muslims consider to be perfectly preserved.

Jesus, not Muhammad, completely fulfilled this verse. He was from among his Jewish brethren (cf. Gal. 4:4). He fulfilled Deuteronomy 18:18 in that “he will tell them everything I command him.” Jesus said, “I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me” (John 8:28). And, “I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it” (John 12:49). He called himself a “prophet” (Luke 13:33), and the people considered him a prophet (Matt. 21:11 ; Luke 7:16 ; 24:19 ; John 4:19 ; 6:14 ; 7:40 ; 9:17). As the Son of God, Jesus was prophet (speaking to men for God), priest (Hebrews 7–10 , speaking to God for men), and king (reigning over men for God, Revelation 19–20).

Other characteristics of the “Prophet” to come fit only Jesus. These include speaking with God “face to face” and performing “signs and wonders,” which Muhammad admitted he did not do (see below).

Deuteronomy 33:2 . Many Islamic scholars believe this verse predicts three separate visitations of God—one on “Sinai” to Moses, another in “Seir” through Jesus, and a third in “Paran” (Arabia) through Muhammad who came to Mecca with an army of “ten thousand.”

This contention can be easily answered by looking at a map of the area. Paran and Seir are near Egypt in the Sinai peninsula (cf. Gen. 14:6 ; Num. 10:12 ; 12:16–13:3 ; Deut. 1:1), not in

Palestine where Jesus ministered. Paran is hundreds of miles from Mecca in the northeastern Sinai.

More significant, this verse is speaking of the “ LORD ” coming, not Muhammad. And he is coming with “ten thousand *saints*,” not 10,000 *soldiers*, as Muhammad did.

This prophecy is said to be a “blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his *death*” (vs. 1). If it were a prediction about Islam, which has been a constant enemy of Israel, it could scarcely have been a blessing to Israel. In fact, the chapter goes on to pronounce a blessing on each of the tribes of Israel by God, who “will drive out the enemy” (vs. 27).

Deuteronomy 34:10 . This verse claims that “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses.” Muslims argue that this proves that the predicted prophet could not be an Israelite but was Muhammad instead.

However, the “since” means since Moses’ death to the time this last chapter was written, probably by Joshua. Even if Deuteronomy was written much later, as some critics believe, it was composed many centuries before the time of Christ and would not eliminate him.

As noted above, Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of this prediction of the prophet to come. One reason this could not refer to Muhammad is that the prophet to come was like Moses, who did “all those miraculous signs and wonders the Lord sent” (Deut. 34:11). Muhammad by his own confession did not perform signs and wonders, as did Moses and Jesus (see sura 2:118; 3:183). Finally, the prophet to come was like Moses who spoke to God “face to face” (Deut. 34:10). Muhammad claimed to receive his revelations through an angel (see sura 25:32; 17:105). Jesus, like Moses, was a direct mediator (1 Tim. 2:5 ; Heb. 9:15), who communicated directly with God (cf. John 1:18 ; 12:49 ; 17). Thus, the prediction could not have referred to Muhammad, as many Muslims claim.

Habakkuk 3:3 . The text declares that “God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth.” Some Muslim scholars believe this refers to the prophet Muhammad coming from Paran (Arabia), and use it in connection with a similar text in Deuteronomy 33:2 .

As already noted (in comments on Deut. 33:2 above), Paran is hundreds of miles from Mecca, to which Muhammad came. Further, the verse is speaking of God coming, not Muhammad, who denied being God. Finally, the “praise” could not refer to Muhammad (whose name means “the praised one”), since the subject of both “praise” and “glory” is God, and Muslims would be the first to acknowledge that Muhammad is not God and should not be praised as God.

Psalms 45:3–5 . Since this verse speaks of one coming with the “sword” to subdue his enemies, Muslims sometimes cite it as a prediction of their prophet Muhammad, who was known as “the prophet of the sword.” They insist it could not refer to Jesus, since he never came with a sword, as he himself admitted (in Matt. 26:52).

However, the very next verse (vs. 6) identifies the person spoken of as “God” whom, according to the New Testament, Jesus claimed to be (John 8:58 ; 10:30), but Muhammad repeatedly denied being anything other than a human prophet (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF).

Further, although Jesus did not come the first time with a sword, the Bible declares that he will at his second coming, when the “armies of heaven” will follow him (Rev. 19:11–16). The first time he came to die (Mark 10:45 ; John 10:10–11). The second time he will come in “blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God” (2 Thess. 1:7–8). So there is no warrant in taking this as a prediction of Muhammad. Indeed Hebrews 1:8–9 explicitly identifies Christ as the subject of this passage.

Isaiah 21:7 . Isaiah in vision sees chariots with teams of horses, riders on donkeys or riders on camels. Muslim commentators take the rider on the “donkeys” to be Jesus and the rider on “camels” to be Muhammad, whom they believed superseded Jesus as a prophet. But this is speculation with no basis in the text or context. Even a casual look at the passage reveals that it is speaking about the fall of Babylon several centuries before the time of Christ. Verse 9 declares: “Babylon has fallen, has fallen!” There is nothing in the text about either Christ or Muhammad. Further, the reference to horses, donkeys, and camels is speaking about the various means by which the news of Babylon’s fall would spread. Again, absolutely nothing here refers to Muhammad.

Matthew 3:11 . According to Dawud, this prediction of John the Baptist could not refer to Christ and must refer to Muhammad (157). John said, “after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.” Dawud argues that “the very preposition ‘after’ clearly excludes Jesus from being the foretold Prophet,” since “they were both contemporaries and born in one and the same year.” Further, “it was not Jesus Christ who could be intended by John, because if such were the case he would have followed Jesus and submitted to him like a disciple and subordinate.” What is more, “if Jesus were in reality the person whom the Baptist foretold, . . . there would be no necessity nor any sense in his being baptized by his inferior in the river like an ordinary penitent Jew!” Indeed, John “ *did not know* the gift of prophecy in Jesus until he heard— *while in prison* —of his miracles.” Finally, since the one John proclaimed was to make Jerusalem and its temple more glorious (cf. Hag. 2:8–9 ; Mal. 3:1), it could not have referred to Christ; otherwise this “is to confess the absolute failure of the whole enterprise” (Dawud, 158–60).

Jesus’ public ministry did not begin until “after” that of John’s, precisely as John said. Jesus did not begin until after his baptism by John (Matt. 3:16–17) and temptation (Matt. 4:1–11). Second, John did defer to Jesus, saying he was unworthy even to carry his shoes (Matt. 3:11). In fact, the text says “John tried to deter him [Jesus], saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ ” (Matt. 3:14). Third, Jesus stated his reason for baptism, namely, it was necessary “to fulfill all righteousness” (Matt. 3:15). Since he came not to “abolish them [Law or the Prophets] but to fulfill them” (Matt. 5:17). He had to identify with its demands. Otherwise, he would not have been, as he was, perfectly righteous (cf. Rom. 8:1–4). Fourth, John clearly knew who Christ was when he baptized him, since he proclaimed him to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). And he, with the crowd, saw the “Spirit of God” descend on Jesus and the “voice from Heaven” proclaim, “This is my Son, whom I love;

with him I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:16–17). While John did express some later questions, these were quickly answered by Christ who assured him by his miracles (Matt. 11:3–5) that he was the Messiah predicted by Isaiah (35:5–6 ; 40:3).

Finally, all of the Old Testament prophecies about Messiah (Christ) were not fulfilled at his first coming; some await his coming again (*see* PROPHECY, AS PROOF OF BIBLE). Jesus stated that he would not set up his kingdom until the end of the age (Matt 24:3), when they would “see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory” (Matt. 24:30). Only then “the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, . . . [and his apostles] on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt. 19:28).

Jesus’ eyewitness contemporaries and disciples considered him to be the one predicted in the Old Testament, since that is precisely how they apply the predictions of Malachi (3:1) and Isaiah (40:3) in their writings (cf. Matt. 3:1–3 ; Mark 1:1–3 ; Luke 3:4–6).

John 14:16 . Muslim scholars see in Jesus’ reference to the coming of the promised “Helper” (Gk. *paraclete*) a prediction of Muhammad. They base this on the *Qur’anic* (sura 61:6) reference to Muhammad as “Ahmad” (*periclytos*), which they take to be the correct rendering of the Greek word *paraclete* here.

Of the more than 5000 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament (Geisler and Nix , chap. 22), there is absolutely no manuscript authority for placing the word *periclytos* (“praised one”) in the original, as the Muslims claim it should read. Universally they read *paraclete* (“helper”). In this passage Jesus clearly identifies the “Helper” as “the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send” (John 14:26).

The Helper was given to Jesus’ apostles (vs. 16), namely, those who would “testify” of him because they “have been with . . . [him] from the beginning” (John 15:27 ; cf. Luke 1:1–2 ; Acts 1:22). But Muhammad was not one of Jesus’ apostles, so he could not have been the one Jesus referred to as the “Helper” (*paraclete*).

The Helper Jesus promised was to abide with them “forever” (vs. 16), but Muhammad has been dead for over thirteen centuries.

Jesus said to the disciples, “You know him [the Helper]” (vs. 17), but the apostles did not know Muhammad. He would not be born for another six centuries. Also, Jesus told his apostles that the Helper will be “in you” (vs. 17). Muhammad could not have been “in” Jesus’ apostles. Their teaching was not in accord with Muhammad’s, so he could not have been “in” Jesus’ apostles in any sort of spiritual or doctrinally compatible way.

Jesus affirmed that the Helper would be sent “in my [Jesus’] name” (John 14:26). But no Muslim believes Muhammad was sent by Jesus in Jesus’ name.

The Helper Jesus was about to send would not “speak on his own” (John 16:13). But Muhammad constantly testifies to himself (for example, in sura 33:40). The Helper would

“glorify” Jesus (John 16:14), but Islam declares that Muhammad supersedes Jesus. He would not be glorifying Jesus who he considered an earlier and, in that sense, inferior prophet.

Finally, Jesus asserted that the Helper would come in “not many days” (Acts 1:5), rather than after hundreds of years. The Holy Spirit came fifty days later on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1–2).

Muslim Use of Scripture. Careful observation of all these texts in their literary setting shows that they are wrenched out of their context by Muslim apologists eager to find in Judeo-Christian Scripture something to show the superiority of Islam (*see* CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF). Islamic scholars complain when Christians try to interpret the *Qur’an* to Christian advantage. But they are guilty of the very thing they charge.

Muslim usage of Scripture is often arbitrary and without textual warrant. Although Islamic scholars are quick to point out that the Scriptures have been corrupted (*see* NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS), nevertheless, when they come upon a text they feel can be made to lend credence to their view, they have no problem accepting its authenticity. Their determination of which biblical texts are authentic is arbitrary and self-serving.

Conclusion. Nowhere did the Bible predict the coming of Muhammad. Attempts by Muslim apologists to claim such involved forced interpretations contrary to the context of the passage. Rather, the Old Testament prophets predicted in detail the coming of Christ. Christ, not Muhammad, is confirmed to be God’s Messenger (*see* MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF ; CHRIST, DEITY OF). Indeed, Christ is proven to be the very Son of God.

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Muhammad, Alleged Divine Call of. Muhammad claims to be called of God to be a prophet. Indeed, he claimed to be the last of God’s prophets on earth, “the Seal of the Prophets” (sura 33:40). The alleged miraculous nature of his call is used by Muslims to prove that Islam is the true religion.

An examination of the facts, even from Muslim sources, reveals that the Muslim view of Muhammad suffers an acute case of overclaim. One does not find, for example, support for the claim that he was called to bring the full and final revelation from God in the circumstances that surround Muhammad’s call.

Elements of the Call. Choked by an Angel. During his call Muhammad said he was choked by the angel—three times. Muhammad said of the angel, “he choked me with the cloth until I believed that I should die. Then he released me and said: ‘Recite!’ (*Iqra*). When he hesitated, he received “twice again the repeated harsh treatment” (Andrae, 43–44). This seems an unusual form of coerced learning, uncharacteristic of the gracious and merciful God Muslims claim Allah to be, as well as contrary to the free choice they believe he has granted his creatures.

Deceived by a Demon? Muhammad himself questioned the divine origin of the experience. At first he thought he was being deceived by a *jinn* or evil spirit. In fact, Muhammad was at first deathly afraid of the source of his newly found revelation, but he was encouraged by his wife Khadijah and her cousin, Waraqah, to believe that the revelation was the same as that of Moses and that he too would be a prophet of his nation. One of the most widely respected modern Muslim biographer, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, speaks vividly of Muhammad’s plagues fear that he was demon possessed:

Stricken with panic, Muhammad arose and asked himself, ‘What did I see? *Did possession of the devil which I feared all along come to pass?*’ Muhammad looked to his right and his left but saw nothing. For a while he stood there trembling with fear and stricken with awe. He feared the cave might be haunted and that he might run away still unable to explain what he saw. [74, emphasis added]

Haykal notes that Muhammad had feared demon possession before, but his wife Khadijah talked him out of it. For “as she did on earlier occasions when *Muhammad feared possession by the devil*, so now stood firm by her husband and devoid of the slightest doubt.” Thus “respectfully, indeed reverently, she said to him, ‘Joy to my cousin! Be firm. By him who dominates Khadijah’s soul I pray and hope that you will be the Prophet of this nation. By God, he will not let you down’ ” (ibid., 75). Indeed, Haykal’s description of Muhammad’s experience of receiving a “revelation” fits that of other mediums. Haykal wrote of the revelation to remove the suspicion of guilt for one of Muhammad’s wives:

Muhammad had not moved from his spot when revelation came to him accompanied by the usual convulsions. He was stretched out in his clothes and a pillow was placed under his head. A’ishah [his wife] later reported, “Thinking that something ominous was about to happen, everyone in the room was frightened except me, for I did not fear a thing, knowing I was innocent . . .” Muhammad recovered, he sat up and began to wipe his forehead where beads of perspiration had gathered. [ibid., 337]

Another characteristic often associated with occult “revelations” is contact with the dead (cf. Deut. 18:9–14). The Muslim biographer, Haykal, relates an occasion when “The Muslims who overheard him [Muhammad] asked, ‘Are you calling the dead?’ and the Prophet answered, ‘They hear me no less than you do, except that they are unable to answer me’ ” (ibid., 231). On another occasion Muhammad was found “praying for the dead buried in that cemetery” (ibid., 495). Haykal even frankly admits that “There is hence no reason to deny the event of the Prophet’s visit to the cemetery of Baqi as out of place considering *Muhammad’s spiritual and psychic power of communication with the realms of reality and his awareness of spiritual reality that surpasses that of ordinary men* ” (ibid., 496, emphasis added).

Silence and Depression. Also clouding the alleged divine origin of his message is the fact that after this there was a long period of silence which, according to some accounts lasted about three years, during which time Muhammad fell into the depths of despair, feeling forsaken by God, and considering suicide. These circumstances seem uncharacteristic of a divine call.

The Satanic "Revelation." On another occasion Muhammad set forth a revelation he thought was from God, but later changed it, claiming Satan had slipped the verses into the text. God said to the prophet, "They are but names which ye have named, ye and your fathers, for which Allah hath revealed no warrant" (sura 53:23, Pickethall trans. cf. 22:51). But unfortunately human deception is always a possibility. Muslims themselves believe that all claimants to revelations opposing the *Qur'an* involve deception. In view of this, it is reasonable to ask whether Muslims have taken seriously the possibility that Muhammad's first impression was the right one, that he was being deceived by a demon. They acknowledge that Satan is real and that he is a great deceiver. Why then dismiss the possibility that Muhammad himself was being deceived, as he first thought?

Human Sources for Qur'an. Finally, some critics see nothing at all supernatural in the source of Muhammad's ideas, noting that the vast majority of ideas in the *Qur'an* have known Jewish, Christian, or pagan sources (see QUR'AN, ALLEGED DIVINE ORIGIN OF). Even the noted biographer, Haykal, unwittingly places his finger on a possible source of Muhammad's "revelations." He wrote,

The Arab's imagination is by nature strong. Living as he does under the vault of heaven and moving constantly in search of pasture or trade, and being constantly forced into the excesses, exaggerations, and even lies which the life of trade usually entails, the Arab is given to the exercise of his imagination and cultivates it at all times whether for good or for ill, for peace or for war. [ibid., 319]

Conclusion. The claim that Muhammad was called of God is not supportable by the evidence. Indeed, the indication, even in Muslim sources, is just the opposite. What is more, there is no supernatural confirmation of this call (see MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED MIRACLES OF) such as there is in the case of Jesus (see CHRIST, DEITY OF ; PROPHECY AS PROOF OF BIBLE ; RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR).

Finally, the character of Muhammad falls far short of his claim (see MUHAMMAD, CHARACTER OF). Compared to the impeccable character of Christ, Muhammad pales into insignificance (see CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF).

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Muhammad, Character of. Most students of Islam acknowledge that Muhammad was generally a moral person. Many Muslims insist that he was both beyond (major) sin and was the perfect moral example. They claim that Muhammad "stands in history as the best model for man in piety and perfection. He is a living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue" (Abdalati, 8). This, they say, is a chief proof that Muhammad is the unique prophet from God (Pfander, 225–26).

A popular Muslim classic by Kamal ud Din ad Damiri gives us the following description of the prophet Muhammad:

Mohammad is the most favored of mankind, the most honored of all apostles, the prophet of mercy. . . . He is the best of prophets, and his nation is the best of nations; . . . He was perfect in intellect, and was of noble origin. He had an absolutely graceful form, complete generosity, perfect bravery, excessive humility, useful knowledge . . . perfect fear of God and sublime piety. He was the most eloquent and the most perfect of mankind in every variety of perfection. . . . (Gudel, 72).

Evaluating Muhammad's Character. Polygamy. There are areas, however, where questions arise about the moral perfection of Muhammad. The first is the matter of his polygamy. According to the *Qur'an*, a man may have four wives (sura 4:3). This raises two questions: Is polygamy moral? Was Muhammad consistent with his own law?

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, polygamy is considered morally wrong. Although God permitted it, along with other human frailties and sins, he never approved it (see POLYGAMY). The *Qur'an*, however, clearly sanctions polygamy, allowing that a man may have up to four wives, if he is able to provide for them. Sura 4:3 declares, "Marry women of your choice, Two, or three, or four."

Without presupposing the truth of Christian revelation, there are arguments against polygamy from a moral point of view common to both Muslims and Christians. Monogamy should be recognized by *precedent*, since God gave the first man only one wife (Eve). It is implied by *proportion*, since the number of males and females God brings into the world are about equal. And monogamy is implied by *parity*. If men can marry several wives, it seems only fair that a wife can have several husbands.

Even biographer Muhammad Husayn Haykal tacitly acknowledged the superiority of monogamy when he affirmed that "the happiness of the family and that of the community can best be served by the limitations which monogamy imposes" (294). Muhammad's relationships with his wives are themselves an argument against polygamy. The wives went so far as to plot against him. This is understandable in that Muhammad often ignored some of his wives, and avoided others on many occasions (ibid., 436). He adds, "Indeed, favoritism for some of his wives had created such controversy and antagonism among the 'Mothers of the Believers' that Muhammad once thought of divorcing some of them" (ibid., 437). All of this falls short of an exemplary moral situation in principle and practice.

Even if polygamy, as taught in the *Qur'an*, is deemed morally right, there remains another serious problem. Muhammad received a revelation from God that a man should have no more than four wives at once, yet he had many more. A Muslim defender of Muhammad, writing in *The Prophet of Islam as the Ideal Husband*, admitted that he had fifteen wives. Yet he tells others they may have only four. How can someone be a perfect moral example and not live by one of the basic laws he laid down for others as from God?

The Muslim answer is unconvincing. Muhammad received a “revelation” that God had made an exception for him but not for anyone else. He quotes God as saying: “Prophet! We have Made lawful to thee Thy wives . . . ; And any believing woman Who dedicates her soul To the Prophet if the Prophet Wishes to wed her;” but adds quickly, “—this Only for thee, and not For the Believers” (sura 33:50). What is more, Muslims believe (based on sura 4:3b and other teachings) that they may have an unlimited number of concubines, especially among those they conquer in war. This was, no doubt, a powerful motivation for success on the battlefield.

In addition, Muhammad claimed a divine exemption to another law giving each wife her conjugal rights “justly.” Husbands were to observe a fixed rotation among their wives. Muhammad insists that God told him that he could have whomever he wanted when he wanted them: “Thou mayest defer (the turn Of) any of them that thou Pleasest, and thou mayest receive Any thou pleasest” (Sura 33:51). Apparently even God had to put the brakes on Muhammad’s love for women. For eventually he received a revelation that said, is not lawful for thee [to have many more] women After this, nor to change Them for (other) wives, Even though their beauty Attract thee” (Sura 33:52). A look at the facts of Muhammad’s lust and inconsistency makes one wonder how he can be considered a perfect moral example and ideal husband.

The Treatment of Women. The *Qur'an* and Hadith accord a lower status to women. The superior status of men is based directly on commands in the *Qur'an*. As noted, men can marry four wives (polygamy) but women cannot marry multiple husbands. Sura 2:228 explicitly affords men the right to divorce their wives but does not accord the equal right to women, claiming “Men have a degree of advantage over them” (sura 2:228).

Muhammad sanctioned the beating of a female servant in order to elicit the truth from her. “The servant was called in and Ali immediately seized her and struck her painfully and repeatedly as he commanded her to tell the truth to the Prophet of God” (Haykal, 336). According to the *Qur'an*, men can beat their wives. Sura 4:34 declares: “Men are in charge of women because Allah hath made the one to excel the other. . . . As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge them” (Pickethall trans.). Yusuf Ali attempts to soften this verse by adding “lightly,” a word not found in the Arabic.

Muslim women must wear a veil, stand behind their husbands, and kneel behind them in prayer. Two women must bear witness in civil contracts as opposed to one man (Abdalati, 189–91).

In a Hadith found in the Sahih Al-Bukhari we find the following narrative describing the inferior status of women:

Narrated [by] Ibn ‘Abbas: The Prophet said: “I was shown the Hell-fire and that the majority of its dwellers were women who were ungrateful.” It was asked, “Do they disbelieve in Allah?” (or are they ungrateful to Allah?) He replied, “They are ungrateful to their husbands and are ungrateful for the favors and the good (charitable deeds) done to them.” [Bukhari, 1.29]

In view of these statements, it seems incredible to hear Muslim apologists say, “Evidently, Muhammad not only honored woman more than did any other man, but he raised her to the status which truly belongs to her—an accomplishment of which Muhammad alone has so far been capable” (Haykal, 298). Another Muslim writer states, “Islam has given woman rights and privileges which she has never enjoyed under other religious or constitutional systems” (Abdalati, 184).

Muhammad’s Moral Imperfection. Muhammad was far from sinless. Even the *Qur'an* speaks of his need to ask God for forgiveness. In sura 40:55 God told him, “Patiently, then, persevere: For the Promise of God Is true: and ask God forgiveness For thy fault.” On another occasion God told Muhammad, “Know, therefore, that There is no god But God, and ask Forgiveness for thy fault, and for the men And women who believe” (sura 41:19). Clearly forgiveness was to be sought for his own sins, not just for others (cf. also 48:2).

On one occasion, Haykal said flatly, “Muhammad did in fact err when he frowned in the face of [the blind beggar] ibn Umm Maktum and sent him away. . . . in this regard he [Muhammad] was as fallible as anyone” (134). If so, then one finds it difficult to believe that Muhammad can be so eulogized. However much an improvement Muhammad’s morals may have been over many others of his day, he falls short of the perfect example for all people of all times that many Muslims claim for him. Unlike the Jesus of the Gospels, he certainly would not want to challenge his foes with the question: “Which of you convicts me of sin?” (John 8:46).

Holy Wars. Muhammad believed in holy war (the *Jihad*). By divine revelation he commanded his followers: “fight in the cause Of God” (sura 2:244). He added, “fight and slay The Pagans wherever ye find them” (sura 9:5). And, “when ye meet The Unbelievers (in fight) Smite at their necks” (sura 47:4). In general, Muslims were to “fight those who believe not In God nor the Last Day” (sura 9:29). Indeed, Paradise is promised for those who fight for God. Sura 3:195 declares: “Those who have left their homes . . . Or fought or been slain,—Verily, I will blot out From them their iniquities, And admit them into Gardens With rivers flowing beneath;—A reward from the Presence Of God, and from His Presence Is the best of rewards” (cf. sura 2:244; 4:95). These “holy wars” were carried out “in the cause Of God” (cf. sura 2:244) against “unbelievers.”

Sura 5:36 declares that “The punishment of those Who wage war against God [i.e., unbelievers] And His Apostle, and strive With might and main For mischief through the land Is: execution, or crucifixion, Or the cutting off of hands And feet from opposite sides, Or exile from the land.” Acknowledging that these are appropriate punishments, depending on “the circumstances,” Ali offers little consolation when he notes that the more cruel forms of Arabian treatment of enemies, such as, “piercing of eyes and leaving the unfortunate victim exposed to a tropical sun,” were abolished! (Ali, 252, 738). Such war on, and persecution of, enemies on

religious grounds—by whatever means—is seen by most critics as religious intolerance. In view of these clear commands to use the sword aggressively to spread Islam and Muslim practice down through the centuries, Muslim claims that “this fight is waged solely for the freedom to call men unto God and unto His religion” have a hollow ring (cf. Haykal, 212).

Moral Expediency. Muhammad sanctioned the raiding of commercial Meccan caravans by his followers (Haykal, 357f.). The prophet himself led three raids. Doubtless the purpose of these attacks was not only obtaining financial reward, but also to impress the Meccans with the growing power of the Muslim force. Critics of Islam question this piracy. These actions cast a dark shadow over Muhammad’s alleged moral perfection.

Another time Muhammad approved of a follower lying to an enemy named Khalid in order to kill him. Then in the presence of the man’s wives “he fell on him with his sword and killed him. Khalid’s women were the only witnesses and they began to cry and mourn for him” (Haykal, 273).

On other occasions Muhammad had no aversion to politically expedient assassinations. When a prominent Jew, Ka’b Ibn Al-Ashraf, had stirred up discord against Muhammad and composed a satirical poem about him, the prophet asked: “Who will deliver me from Ka?” Immediately four persons volunteered and shortly returned to Muhammad with Ka’b’s head in their hands (Gudel, 74). Haykal acknowledges many such assassinations in his book, *The Life of Muhammad*. Of one he wrote, “the Prophet ordered the execution of Uqbah ibn Abu Muayt. When Uqbah pleaded, ‘Who will take care of my children, O Muhammad?’ Muhammad answered, ‘The fire’ ”(234; cf. 236, 237, 243).

The *Qur’an* itself informs us that Muhammad was not indisposed to breaking promises when he found it advantageous. He even got a “revelation” to break a long-standing pledge to avoid killing during the sacred month of pilgrimage: “They ask thee Concerning fighting In the Prohibited Month. Say: ‘Fighting therein Is a grave (offense); But graver is it In the sight of God To prevent access To the path of God ’ ” (sura 2:217). Again, “God has already ordained For you, (O men), The dissolution of your oaths (In some cases)” (sura 66:2). Rather than consistency, Muhammad’s moral life was sometimes characterized by expediency.

Retaliation. On at least two occasions Muhammad ordered people assassinated for composing poems that mocked him. This extremely oversensitive overreaction to ridicule is defended by Haykal: “For a man like Muhammad, whose success depended to a large extent upon the esteem which he could win, a malicious satirical composition could be more dangerous than a lost battle” (Gudel, 74). But this is a pragmatic, end-justifies-means ethic.

Even though “the Muslims were always opposed to killing any women or children,” nonetheless, Haykal says, “a Jewish woman was executed because she had killed a Muslim by dropping a millstone on his head” (314). On another occasion, two slave women who had allegedly spoken against Muhammad in song were executed with their master (410). When it was believed that one woman, Abu ‘Afk, had insulted Muhammad (by a poem), one of Muhammad’s followers “attacked her during the night while she was surrounded by her children,

one of whom she was nursing. . . . After removing the child from his victim, he killed her” (Haykal, 243).

The zeal with which Muhammad’s followers would kill for him was infamous. Haykal records the words of one devotee who would have killed his daughter at Muhammad’s command. Umar ibn al Khattab declared fanatically, “By God, if he [Muhammad] were to ask me to strike off her head, I would do so without hesitation” (Haykal, 439).

Mercilessness. Muhammad attacked the last Jewish tribe of Medina on the suspicion that they had plotted with the Meccan enemies against Muslims. Unlike the previous two Jewish tribes that had been simply expelled from the city, this time all the men of the tribe were put to death and the women and children were sold into slavery. Said one who tried to justify this, “one must see Muhammad’s cruelty toward the Jews against the background of the fact that their scorn and rejection was the greatest disappointment of his life, and for a time they threatened completely to destroy his prophetic authority” (Andrae, 155–56). In any case, would this justify killing the men and making slaves of the women and children? And is this kind of activity exemplary of a person who is supposed to be of flawless moral character?

In spite of this evidence against Muhammad, one defender of Islam responds that even if “their claims were true, we would still refute them with the simple argument that the great stand above the law” (Haykal, 298)!

Conclusion. Muslims make outstanding claims about the character of Muhammad, even attributing moral perfection to him. However, the record of Muhammad, even from the *Qur’an* and Muslim tradition (*Hadith*) falls far short of these claims. While being a generally moral person in his everyday dealings, Muhammad taught, approved of, and participated in morally imperfect activities. There is no evidence that he was morally superior to a typical human being. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. By contrast, the life of Christ was impeccable (*see* CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF).

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Muhammad, Alleged Miracles of. Islam claims to be the one true religion. In support of this claim they offer the *Qur'an* as their chief miracle. However, many Muslim apologists also claim that Muhammad performed other miracles to support his claims to be a prophet of God, in spite of the fact that when asked to perform miracles to support his claims, Muhammad refused to do so (sura 3:181–84).

Muslim Definition of a Miracle. For Muslims a miracle is always an act of God (see MIRACLE ; MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE). Nature is the way God works customarily and repeatedly and miracles are seen as *khawarik*, “the breaker of usage.” There are many words for miracle in Arabic, but the only one used in the *Qur'an* is *ayah*, “sign” (cf. suras 2:118, 151, 253; 3:108; 28:86–87). The technical term used by Muslim scholars to designate a miracle that confirms one to be a prophet is *mudjiza*. To qualify it needs to be:

1. an act of God that cannot be done by any creature;
2. contrary to the customary course of things;
3. aimed at proving the authenticity of the prophet;
4. preceded by the announcement of a forthcoming miracle;
5. done in the exact manner in which it was announced;
6. done only through the hands of the prophet;
7. in no way a disavowal of his prophetic claim;
8. accompanied by a challenge to duplicate it; and
9. unduplicated by anyone present.

Muslims believe that Moses, Elijah, and Jesus performed miracles that fulfilled these criteria (see “Mudjiza”). The question is: Does the eloquence of the *Qur'an* meet these characteristics to be a miracle? A subjective answer is that it does not, in either form or content.

Miracles in the Qur'an. Miracle claims about Muhammad fall into three categories: claims recorded in the *Qur'an*; supernatural predictions of Muhammad made in the *Qur'an*; and miracle claims in the *Hadith* or Islamic tradition (Bukhari, iii–vi).

Sura 6:35 is used by many Muslims to show that Muhammad could do miracles. It reads: “If their spurning is hard On thy mind, yet if Thou wert able to seek A tunnel in the ground Or a ladder to the skies And bring them a Sign,—(What good?).”

Careful examination of the text reveals that it does not claim that Muhammad was able to perform miracles. First of all, it is hypothetical—“If Thou were able. . . .” It does not say he was able. Second, the passage even implies that he could not perform miracles. Otherwise, why was he being spurned for not doing so? If he could have done miracles, then he could have easily stopped the spurning that was so “hard On thy [his] mind.”

The Alleged Splitting of the Moon. Many Muslims understand sura 54:1–2 to mean that upon Muhammad’s command before unbelievers the moon was split in half. For it reads: “The Hour (of judgment) Is nigh, and the moon Is cleft asunder. But if they see A Sign, they turn away, And say, ‘This is (But) transient magic.’ ”

Again there are difficulties with this understanding of the text. Muhammad is not mentioned in the passage. The *Qur'an* does not call this a miracle, though the word sign (*ayah*) is used. If it is a miracle, it contradicts other passages that claim Muhammad did not perform feats of nature like this (cf. 3:181–84).

Further, this passage is earlier than those in which unbelievers are calling for a sign. If Muhammad had pulled it off, the sign would have been universally observed and noted with wonder throughout the world. But there is no evidence that it was (Pfander, 311–12). Even Muslim scholars say this is speaking about the resurrection of the last days, not a miracle during Muhammad’s day. They maintain that the phrase “the Hour (of judgment)” refers to the end times. The tense they take as the usual Arabic way of expressing a future prophetic event.

The Night Journey. One miraculous occurrence recorded in the *Qur'an* is Muhammad’s *Isra* or “night journey.” Many Muslims believe Muhammad, after being transported to Jerusalem, ascended into heaven on the back of a mule. Sura 17:1 declares: “Glory to (God) Who did take His Servant For a Journey by night From the Sacred Mosque To the Farthest Mosque, Whose precincts We did Bless,—in order that We Might show him some Of Our Signs.” Later Muslim traditions expanded on this verse, speaking of Muhammad’s escort by Gabriel through several levels of heaven. He is greeted by important people (Adam, John, Jesus, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham). While there he bargains God down in his command to pray fifty times to five times a day.

There is no reason to take this passage as referring to a literal trip to heaven. Many Muslim scholars do not so interpret it. The noted translator of the *Qur'an*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, commenting on this passage, notes that “it opens with the mystic Vision of the Ascension of the Holy Prophet; he is transported from the Sacred Mosque (of Mecca) to the Farthest Mosque (of Jerusalem) in a night and shown some of the Signs of God” (“Introduction to Sura XVII,” 691). Even according to one of the earliest Islamic traditions, Muhammad’s wife, A’isha, reported that “The apostle’s body remained where it was but God removed his spirit by night” (Ishaq, 183). Even were this to be understood as a miracle, there is no evidence presented to test its

authenticity. By Islam's own definition of a confirming sign, this miracle would have no apologetic value ("Mudjiza"; see MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF).

The Victory at Badr. Another miracle claim often attributed to Muhammad is the victory at Badr (see suras 3:123; 8:17). Sura 5:12 reads: "O ye who believe! Call in remembrance The favour of God Unto you when Certain men formed the design To stretch out Their hands against you, But (God) held back Their hands from you: So fear God."

According to Islamic tradition, several miracles are said to have occurred here, the most prominent of which was that God sent 3000 angels to help in the battle (supposedly identifiable by the turbans they wore) and the miraculous rescue of Muhammad just before a Meccan was going to kill him with a sword. One tradition tells of Muhammad throwing a handful of dirt into the Meccan army to blind them and drive them into retreat.

It is questionable whether all of these passages refer to the same event. Even many Muslim scholars believe sura 8 is speaking of another event and is to be taken figuratively of God casting fear into the heart of Muhammad's enemy, Ubai ibn Khalaf (Pfander, 314). Sura 5 is taken by some to refer to another event, possibly to the attempted assassination of Muhammad at Usfan.

Only sura 3 mentions Badr, and it says nothing about a miracle. At best it would reveal only God's providential care for Muhammad, not a supernatural event. Certainly it does not speak of a miracle that confirms Muhammad's prophetic credentials, since there is no evidence that it fits the nine criteria.

If Badr's victory is a sign of divine confirmation, then why was not the subsequent defeat at Uhud a sign of divine disapproval? So humiliating was the defeat that they "pulled out two links of chain from Muhammad's wound, and two of his front teeth fell off in the process." In addition, the Muslim dead were mutilated on the battlefield by the enemy. One enemy of Muhammad "cut off a number of noses and ears [of his troops] in order to make a string and necklace of them." Even Muhammad Husayn Haykal acknowledged that "the Muslims suffered defeat" here, noting that the enemy was "intoxicated with her victory" (Haykal, 266-67). Yet he did not consider this a supernatural sign of divine disfavor. Indeed, after the battle of Badr, the *Qur'an* boasts that Muhammad's followers could overcome an army with God's help when outnumbered ten to one (sura 8:65). But here they were outnumbered only three to one, just as they were in their victory at Badr, and yet they suffered a great defeat.

Muhammad is not the first outnumbered military leader in history to win a big victory. The Israeli six-day war in 1967 was one of the quickest and most decisive battles in the annals of modern warfare. Yet no Muslim would consider it a miraculous sign of divine approval of Israel over an Arab nation.

The Splitting of Muhammad's Breast. According to Islamic tradition, at Muhammad's birth (or just before his ascension), Gabriel is said to have cut open Muhammad's chest, removed and cleansed his heart, then filled it with wisdom and replaced it. This is based in part on sura 94:1, 2, 8 which reads: "Have We not Expanded thee thy breast?—And removed from thee Thy burden . . . and to thy Lord Turn (all) thy attention?"

Most conservative Islamic scholars take this passage as a figure of speech describing the great anxiety Muhammad experienced in his early years at Mecca. The great *Qur'anic* commentator Ali said, "The breast is symbolically the seat of knowledge and of the highest feeling of love and affection" (Ali, *The Meaning of the Glorious Qur'an*, 2.1755).

Prophecies in the Qur'an. Muslims offer predictive prophecies in the *Qur'an* as a proof that Muhammad could perform miracles. But the evidence is not convincing. The suras most often cited are those in which Muhammad promised victory to his troops.

What religious military leader is there who might not say to his troops: "God is on our side; we are going to win. Fight on!"? Further, remembering that Muhammad is known as "the prophet of the Sword," with his greatest number of conversions coming after he had forsaken the peaceful but relatively unsuccessful means of spreading his message, it should be no surprise that he would predict victory.

Considering the zeal of Muslim forces, who were promised Paradise for their efforts (cf. sura 22:58-59; 3:157-58; 3:170-71), it is no surprise that they were so often victorious. Finally, it is little wonder so many "submitted," considering Muhammad commanded that "the punishment of those Who wage war against God And his Apostle, and strive With might . . . Is: execution, or crucifixion, Or the cutting off of hands And feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land" (sura 5:36).

The only substantive prediction was about the Roman victory over the Persian army at Issus. Sura 30:2-4 reads: "The Roman Empire Has been defeated—In a land close by: But they, (even) after (This) defeat of theirs, Will soon be victorious—within a few years."

This prediction is less than spectacular (see Gudel, 54). According to Ali "a few years" means three to nine years, but the real victory did not come until thirteen or fourteen years after the prophecy. The defeat of the Romans by the Persians in the capture of Jerusalem took place about 614 or 615. The counteroffensive did not begin until 622 and the victory was not complete until 625. This would be at least ten or eleven years, not "a few" spoken by Muhammad.

Uthman's edition of the *Qur'an* had no vowel points, these not being added until much later (Spencer, 21). Hence, the word *sayaghlubuna*, "they shall defeat," could have been rendered, with the change of two vowels, *sayughlabuna*, "they shall be defeated" (Tisdall, 137). Even if this ambiguity were removed, the prophecy is neither long-range nor unusual. One would have expected the defeated Romans to bounce back. It took little more than a perceptive reading of the trends of time to forecast such an event. At best, it could have been a good guess. In any event, there appears to be no sufficient proof that it is supernatural.

The only other alleged prophecy worth mentioning is found in sura 89:2 where the phrase "By the Nights twice five" is taken by some to be a prediction of the ten years of persecution early Muslims experienced (Ahmad, 374f.). But that this is a far-fetched interpretation is evident from the fact that even the translator of the *Qur'an* Ali, admitted that *By the Ten Nights* is usually understood to refer to the first ten nights of *Zul-Hajj*, the sacred season of Pilgrimage (Ali, 1731, n. 6109). There is certainly no clear prediction.

The evidence that Muhammad possessed a truly supernatural gift of prophecy is lacking. His prophecies are vague and disputable. It is far easier to read meaning back in to them after the event than it would have been to see the meaning before hand.

If Muhammad had possessed the ability to miraculously forecast the future, surely he would have used it to squelch his opponents. But he never did. Instead, he admitted that he did not do miracles as the prophets before him had and simply offered as his sign the *Qur'an* .

Finally, Muhammad never offered a prophecy as proof of his prophethood (*see* MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED DIVINE CALL OF). None is mentioned in this connection at all. Jesus repeatedly offered miracles as a proof that he was the Messiah, the Son of God. When about to heal the paralytic, he said to the unbelieving Jews, “that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins,” something the Jews asserted that only God could do (cf. vs. 7), “I say to you, arise, take up your bed and go your way to your house” (Mark 2:10–11). In view of the strong contrast in the ability to provide miraculous confirmations of their respective claims, the thinking person would have to entertain serious doubts as to whether there is sufficient evidence to support Muhammad’s claims.

Miracles in the Hadith. Most miracle claims for Muhammad do not occur in the *Qur'an* , the only book in Islam for which divine inspiration is claimed (*see* MUHAMMAD, ALLEGED MIRACLES OF ; QUR’AN, ALLEGED DIVINE ORIGIN OF). The vast majority of alleged miracles are reported in the *Hadith* (Islamic tradition), considered by Muslims to contain many authentic traditions. There are hundreds of miracle stories in the *Hadith* (*see* HADITH, ALLEGED MIRACLES IN).

Al Bukhari tells how Muhammad healed the broken leg of a companion, Addullaha ibn Atig, who was injured while attempting to assassinate one of Muhammad’s enemies.

Several sources relate the story that Muhammad miraculously provided water for 10,000 of his troops at the battle of Hudaibiyah. He allegedly dipped his hand into an empty water bottle and let the water flow through his fingers. There are numerous stories of miraculous provision of water. In one, water is turned into milk.

Several stories exist of trees speaking to Muhammad, saluting him, or moving from him as he passed. Once when Muhammad could not find a private place to relieve himself, two trees are said to have come together to hide him and then returned when he was finished. Bukhari claims that a tree against which Muhammad leaned missed his company when he left. There are many stories of wolves and even mountains saluting Muhammad.

Some stories speak of Muhammad miraculously feeding large groups with little food. Anas tells that Muhammad fed eighty or ninety men with a few loaves of barley. Ibn Sa’d relates the story of a woman who invited Muhammad to a meal. He took a thousand men with him and multiplied her small meal to feed them all.

The *Hadith* often relates stories of Muhammad’s miraculous dealings with his enemies. Once Muhammad cursed one of his enemies whose horse then sank up to its stomach in hard ground. Sa’d said Muhammad turned a tree branch into a steel sword.

The authenticity of these stories is questionable for many reasons:

They Are Contrary to the Qur’an. For Muslims only the *Qur’an* is divinely inspired. Yet no miracles by Muhammad are recorded in the *Qur’an* . In fact, they are in general contrary to the whole spirit of the Muhammad of the *Qur’an* , who repeatedly refused to do these very kinds of things for unbelievers who challenged him (see sura 3:181–84; 4:153; 6:8–9).

They Are Apocryphal. These alleged miracles of Islamic tradition follow the same story pattern as the apocryphal tales of Christ written a century or two after his death. They are a legendary embellishment by people who lived many years removed from the original events and not a record of contemporary eyewitnesses (*see* MIRACLES, MYTH AND).

Most of those who collected miracle stories lived 100 to 200 years later. They relied on stories passed on orally for generations with ample embellishment. Even the stories accepted by Muslims as authentic, as determined by the *isnad* (or chain of storytellers), lack credibility. These stories are not based on eyewitnesses but rely on generations of storytellers. Joseph Horowitz questioned the reliability of the *isnad*:

The question as to who first circulated these miracle tales would be very easy to answer if we could still look upon the *isnad* , or chain of witnesses, as unquestionably as we are apparently expected to do. It is especially seductive when one and the same report appears in various essentially similar versions. . . . In general the technique of the *isnad* does not make it possible for us to decide where it is a case of taking over oral account and where of copying from the lecture books of teachers. [Horowitz, 49–58]

They Are Not Agreed Upon. Among Muslims there is no generally accepted list of authentic miracles from the *Hadith* . Indeed, the vast majority of stories from the *Hadith* are rejected by most Muslim scholars. Different groups accept different collections. This casts doubt on their authenticity.

Bukhari, considered to be the most reliable collector, admitted that of the 300,000 *Hadith* he collected, he considered only 100,000 might be true. Even these he boiled down to 7275. That means that even he admitted that more than 290,000 of them were unreliable.

No Canon Is Accepted by All. No single *Hadith* canon is accepted by all Muslims. Most Muslims rank their credibility in descending order as follows: the *Sahih* of Al Bukhari (d. 256 A.H. [“After *Hageira* ,” Muhammad’s flight in 622 A.D.]); the *Sahih* of Muslim (d. 261 A.H.), the *Sunan* of Abu Du’ad (d. 275 A.H.), the *Jami* of Al-Tirmidhi (d. 279 A.H.), the *Suand* of Al Nasa (d. 303 A.H.), and the *Sunan* of Ibn Madja (d. 283 A.H.). Along with these *Hadith*, biographers related miracle stories. The most important are Ibn Sa’d (d. 123 A.H.), Ibn Ishaq (d. 151 A.H.), and Ibn Hisham (d. 218 A.H.). The above categories are rejected by Shia Islam, yet they, along with other Muslims, accept the *Qur’an* .

Their Origin Is Suspect. The origin of the miracle claims of Islam is suspect. It is common knowledge that Islam borrowed many of its beliefs and practices from other religions (Dashti, 55). This has been documented frequently. It is not surprising that Muslim miracle claims have arisen, then, as Christian apologists demonstrated the superiority of Jesus to Muhammad by Jesus' miracles (see MIRACLES IN THE BIBLE ; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF). Islamic miracle stories began to appear after two Christian bishops, Abu Qurra from Edessa and Arethas from Caesarea, made a point of Muhammad's lack of authenticating miracles. As Sahas noted: "The implication [of the bishop's challenge] is quite clear: Muhammad's teaching is one that might have merit; but this is not enough to qualify him as a prophet, without supernatural signs. If such signs could be shown one could possibly accept him as a prophet" (312). Thus, if Muslims could invent miracles, they could respond to the Christian challenge.

Sahas notes that several miracle stories bear an amazing resemblance to miracles of Jesus found in the Gospels (ibid., 314). For example, Muhammad ascended into heaven, he changed water into milk and miraculously fed large numbers of people.

A Lack of Apologetic Value. They Do Not Fit Islamic Criteria . No miracle stories fit the nine categories accepted by Muslims for a miracle that can confirm a prophet's claim (*mudjiza*). Hence, by their own standards, none of these stories demonstrate the truth of Islam.

They do not come from the *Qur'an* (which is claimed to be inspired), so they lack divine authority by Islamic criteria. The absence of these events in the *Qur'an* , where Muhammad is constantly challenged to support his claims miraculously, is a strong argument that they are not authentic (see QUR'AN, ALLEGED DIVINE ORIGIN OF). Surely, if Muhammad could have silenced his critics by proving his supernatural confirmation, he would have done so.

Muhammad accepts the fact that God confirmed the prophets before him by miracles. He refers to God's confirmation of Moses' prophetic credentials (cf. sura 7:106–8, 116–19; 23:45). The *Qur'an* also refers to manifestations of God's miraculous power through other prophets (cf. sura 4:63–65; 6:84–86).

Muhammad also accepts the fact that Jesus performed miracles to prove the divine origin of his message, such as his healings and raising people from the dead (cf. sura 5:113). But if Jesus could perform miraculous feats of nature to confirm his divine commission, and Muhammad refused to do the same, Muhammad's superiority to Christ as a prophet is doubtful.

Muhammad's response to the challenge to perform miracles (cf. sura 6:8–9; 17:90–92) is illuminating: "Am I aught but a man—an apostle?" One cannot imagine Moses, Elijah, or Jesus giving such a response. Muhammad admitted that when Moses was challenged by Pharaoh he responded with miracles (cf. sura 7:106–8, 118). Knowing this was God's way to confirm his spokesperson, Muhammad refused to produce similar miracles.

Muslims offer no good explanation for Muhammad's failure to do miracles. The most familiar Islamic argument is that "it is one of the established ways of God that he gives his Prophets that kind of miracles which accord with the genius of the time so that the world may see that it is beyond human power and that the power of God manifests itself in these miracles."

Thus, "During the time of Moses the art of sorcery had made the greatest development. Therefore, Moses was given miracles which dumbfounded the sorcerers and at the sight of these miracles the sorcerers accepted the leadership and prophethood of Moses." Similarly, "during the time of the Prophet of Islam, the art of eloquent speech had made great advances. Therefore, the Prophet of Islam was given the miracle of the *Qur'an* whose eloquence stilled the voices of the greatest poets of his time" (Gudel, 38–39).

But there is no evidence that this is "one of the established ways of God." To the contrary, even by the *Qur'an* 's own admission that God repeatedly gave miracles of nature through Moses and other prophets, including Jesus, it is God's established way to confirm his prophets through miracles. Further, there is nothing supernatural about eloquence.

Summary. Muhammad's unwillingness (and apparent inability) to perform miraculous feats of nature, when he knew that the prophets before him could and did perform them, sounds like a cop-out to thinking non-Muslims. They will ask, "If God confirmed other prophets by such things, then why did he not do the same for Muhammad and remove all doubt?" In Muhammad's own words (from the *Qur'an*), "They [will] say: 'Why is not A Sign sent down To him from his Lord?' " since even Muhammad admitted that "God hath certainly Power to send down a Sign" (sura 6:37).

Muhammad simply offered his own sign (the *Qur'an*) and said their reason for rejecting him was unbelief, not his inability to do miracles. In the few instances where alleged supernatural events are connected to Muhammad's life, they can be explained by natural means. For example, Muslims take Muhammad's outstanding victory at the battle of Badr in 624 as a supernatural indication of divine approval on his behalf. But exactly one year later, Muhammad's forces suffered a humiliating defeat. Yet this is not taken as a sign of divine disapproval.

Unlike the *Qur'an* , Islamic tradition (the *Hadith*) is filled with miracle claims, but they lack authenticity: They contradict the claim of Muhammad in the *Qur'an* . They were recorded a century or more after Muhammad. Most are rejected by Muslim scholars. They show evidence of embellishment. They lack criteria laid down by Muslim scholars for a supernatural confirmation of Muhammad's claims to be a prophet of God.

By contrast, Jesus performed numerous miracles. Most, if not all, of these were performed in connection with his claim to be God in human flesh (see CHRIST, DEITY OF ; MIRACLE). The reports of these miracles are from eyewitnesses and contemporaries of Jesus. In this crucial way there is a significant difference between the supernatural confirmation of Christ to be the Son of God and the lack of credible miraculous confirmation of Muhammad to be even a prophet of God.

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GOTR *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*

Mullins, Edgar Young. E. Y. Mullins was born on January 5, 1860, in Franklin County, Mississippi. He attended Mississippi College and Texas A & M, where he graduated in 1879. After hearing a former lawyer, Major William Evander Penn, speak at First Baptist Church, Dallas, Mullins was converted. Penn had been described as a man who used "reason and persuasion without denunciation" (Nettles, 54). Sensing a call to the ministry, he entered Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1881, where he graduated in 1885, having concentrated in theology and philosophy. In 1886 he married Isla May Hawley. After pastoring in Kentucky and Maryland, he was appointed president of Southern Seminary in 1899, where he remained until his death in 1928.

Mullins was both a theologian and apologist. His primary apologetic work is entitled *Why Is Christianity True?* (1905). His last work, *Christianity at the Crossroads* (1924), is strongly polemical. His other works also have apologetic overtones: *The Axioms of Religion* (1908), *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression* (1917), and *Freedom and Authority in Religion* (1913).

Relation of Science and Scripture. Mullins was strongly influenced by the inductive method of modern science. He also paid tribute to the pragmatist William James. Without discarding traditional apologetics, he believed the task of the day was to "establish the Christian position by means of the principles of investigation employed by the opposition, so far as those principles are valid" (Mullins [1], 4).

Although Mullins fell short of a denunciation of evolution, he strongly defended the direct creation of human beings. He was willing to admit that "God made the world gradually through long eras of time, that there is progress and growth in the universe" (Mullins, [4], 67). Yet his statement on science and religion attacked scientists who make "alleged discoveries in physical nature a convenient weapon of attack upon the facts of religion." Likewise, he opposed "teaching as facts what are merely hypotheses." Although he acknowledged that "evolution has long been a working hypothesis of science," he was quick to point out that "its best exponents freely admit that the causes of the origin of species have not been traced. Nor has any proof been forthcoming that man is not the direct creation of God as recorded in Genesis" (Mullins [5], 64).

Defense of Supernaturalism. Mullins declared that "The supreme issue today is between naturalism and super-naturalism (see MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST). We stand unalterably for the supernatural in Christianity" (Mullins [5], 64). He spoke out strongly against its foundation in naturalism, calling the latter "an outrage against human nature, . . . a million miles away from the great struggling heart of the world" (Mullins [4], 148).

Defense of Theism. Although Mullins stressed Christian experience, he did not totally neglect the value of theist arguments for God's existence (see GOD, EVIDENCE FOR). In *Why Is Christianity True?* he spoke out strongly against the major alternative worldviews of pantheism, idealism, materialism, agnosticism, and naturalistic evolutionism. He did favor, however, the pragmatic verification of Christianity. Nonetheless, he attempted to extricate himself from the charges of subjectivism by stressing the factual and historical basis of Christianity as well as its rational nature. What he opposed was reducing Christianity to a philosophy. He wrote: "Christianity is primarily not a philosophy of the universe. It is a religion. . . . Christianity is a

historical religion, and a religion of experience. It is grounded in facts. the Christian world-view rests upon these facts” (Mullins [4], 163)

Defense of the Historicity of the Gospels. Mullins’ apologetic astuteness is captured in a tribute made by Thorton Whaling, professor of apologetics and theology at the Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Louisville who noted that “Mullins is well acquainted with the historic attacks on the Christian faith and is equally a master of the historic answers” (Nettles, 56). Even his doctrinal work, *The Christian Religion in Its Doctrinal Expression*, contains a strong defense of the facts of the historical Jesus. Based on the integrity of the New Testament witnesses (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF), Mullins reconstructed from the historical records a supernatural Jesus who has a virgin birth, sinless life (*see* CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF), died a substitutionary death, and rose bodily from the dead (*see* RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR).

Defense of the Inspiration of Scripture. Mullins’ approach to Scripture was inductive, following that of James Orr, Marcus Dodds, and William Sanday. He rejected what he thought of as the “scholastic” approach, which made the biblical writers “mere unintelligent instruments or pens used by the Holy Spirit” (Mullins [3], 379). However, he readily confessed his belief that the Bible is revelation from God (*see* BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR). In it, he said, we have “an authoritative Scripture which Christian experience does not and cannot transcend” (ibid., 382). He even speaks of the biblical writers as rendering “truth unmixed with error” (Mullins [2], 144). Following James Orr, he affirms that the Bible “impartially interpreted and judged, is free from demonstrable error in its statements, and harmonious in its teachings” (Mullins [3], 381).

Stress on Christian Experience. Without neglecting the objective and rational dimensions of faith, Mullins placed a strong emphasis on the experiential elements of the Christian faith. Christianity, he said, “has to do with two great groups of facts: the facts of experience and the facts of the historical revelation of God through Christ” (Mullins [2], 18). He recorded testimonies of noted Christians from church history as well as contemporaries. He believed that he had achieved “irrefutable evidence of the objective existence of the Person [God] so moving me” (Mullins, 284). Combining all the experiential testimony of an unbroken line of Christians back to the New Testament, he concluded: “My certainty becomes absolute” (ibid.)

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Mystery. St. Paul wrote: “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He [God] appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16). The incarnation is a mystery (*see* CHRIST, DEITY OF). So is the Trinity .

A mystery is not to be confused with an antinomy or paradox, which involves a logical contradiction (*see* LOGIC). A mystery goes *beyond reason* but not *against reason*. There is no contradiction, yet we lack total comprehension.

Further, a mystery is not something that can be attained by unaided human reason (*see* FAITH AND REASON). A mystery is known only by special divine revelation (*see* REVELATION, SPECIAL). Hence, mysteries are not the subject of natural theology but only of revealed theology.

Another characteristic of a mystery is that while we know *that* both elements making up the mystery are true and ultimately fit together, nevertheless, we do not know *how* they are compatible. For example, we know *that* Christ is both God and human, but it is a mystery just *how* these two natures unite in one person.

Finally, a mystery is distinguished from a problem. A problem has a *solution*; a mystery is the object of *meditation*. A problem calls for *extensive* knowledge; a mystery for *intensive* concentration. Like a missing word in a crossword puzzle, a problem can be solved by more knowledge; a mystery cannot. If it could, it would not be a mystery. Mysteries do not call for *answers*, but for *insights*.

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Mysticism.

Background. The word “mysticism” is derived from the Greek word *mustikos*, meaning one initiated into the mysteries. Eventually, it was used in Christian circles as the branch of Christian

theology that believes in the direct communion of the soul with God. In pantheistic context it usually refers to one who seeks by contemplation and self-surrender to obtain absorption into the Ultimate. In philosophy it often refers to someone who believes that intuitive and immediate knowledge of ultimate reality is possible.

Kinds of Mysticism. Mysticism can be classed in many ways. In terms of worldviews (*see*) it can be divided into Christian and non-Christian or theistic and nontheistic. There are also forms of mysticism in most major world religions. Some, such as Zen Buddhism, are mystical as such. Interest here is in whether mysticism has any apologetic value. That is, does a mystical experience help establish the truth of the belief system of the one having it?

The Nature of a Mystical Experience. Religious experiences are notoriously difficult to define. Friedrich Schleiermacher said religion is a feeling of absolute dependence on the All. Paul Tillich defined religion as an ultimate commitment. Our own analysis found it to be an awareness of some form of transcendent Other (*see* GEISLER , *Philosophy of Religion*).

A Private Religious Experience. Religious experiences are of two basic kinds: general and specific. The first are available to all persons, and the latter are unique to only some. The former is public and the latter is private. Mystical experiences are private by nature. This does not mean that others cannot have similar experiences. It simply means that the experience is unique to the one having it. Also, the general public does not have such experiences at any time.

A Focused Religious Experience. Some forms of awareness are general and others are particular. For example, the awareness of being married is a general one that one has at all times. But the awareness of getting married is a special experience that one has only while going through the ceremony. A mystical experience is more like the latter. It is a focused and intensified awareness of an Ultimate, whereas, a general religious experience is like Schleiermacher's continual and nonspecific awareness of being dependent on the Ultimate.

An Intuitive Experience. Mystical experiences of God are noncognitive. They are not mediated through concepts or ideas. Rather, they are unmediated and intuitive. They are direct contacts with God. As such, they are not discursive. They involve no reasoning processes.

An Ineffable Experience. Although many mystics have attempted descriptions of their experience, most hasten to say that words are inadequate to express it. Many admit that they can only say what it is not. All attempts to be positive are purely metaphorical, allegorical, or symbolical. It can be experienced but not uttered (*see* PLOTINUS).

The Apologetic Value of Mystical Experiences. Mysticism is not without value. As William James (*see*) noted, it points to a state beyond that of the purely empirical and rational. Indeed, Christian forms of mysticism, such as that of Meister Eckhart, have been embraced by many orthodox Christians.

However, our concern here is with the mystics' claim of the self-evident truthfulness of their mystical experiences. They insist that they are as basic as sense perceptions, being a kind of

spiritual perception. Others challenge this and offer many reasons for rejecting any truth value to such experiences.

Mystical Experiences Are Not Self-Authenticating. While it is not necessary to deny that there are transcognitive mental states, it is often claimed by mystics that such experiences are self-authenticating. This appears to be a confusion of two things. They may be authenticating to the self (person) having them, but they are not self-authenticating. Self-authenticating, as in self-evident first principles (*see*), is something that can be known by examining the terms of the proposition. For example, "All triangles are three-sided figures" is self-evident because the predicate says exactly what the subject says. But there is no such parallel in a mystical experience of God.

Mystical Experience Is Not Objective. By their own admission, the experiences mystics have are not public but private. As such, then, they are subjective and not objective. But subjective experiences have validity only for the subject experiencing them. As William James noted in his landmark *Varieties of Religious Experience*, mystical experiences hold no authority over those not having them.

Mystical Experiences Are Not Testable. Since mystical experiences are without an objective basis, they are also untestable. Being subjective by nature, there is no objective test for them. Thus, they are totally relative to the individual having them. As such, there is no way that what the subject experiences can be validly applied to others.

Mystical Experiences Are Self-Cancelling. When a mystical experience is used to support the truth claim of the belief system of the one having it, it is without value for the simple reason that people with conflicting belief systems have mystical experiences. But if the same kind of evidence is used to support opposing beliefs it is self-cancelling. The evidence must be unique to one over the other for it to count for one over the other.

Mystical Experiences Can Be Misinterpreted. No attempt here is made to deny that some people have a mystical experience. Nor is it denied that they may feel that it is self-authenticating. Neither do we challenge the fact that it may appear to them to come with its own self-interpreting label.

It is simply argued that there is no evidence that this is so. Similar experiences by people from different worldviews appear to them to vindicate their particular worldview or religious system. However, that fact in itself shows that it does not vindicate it, since opposites cannot be true. In brief, such experiences are not self-labeled and, hence, they can be mislabeled by the one having them.

Mysticism Leads to Agnosticism . As most mystics admit, they have only a negative knowledge. That is, they know only what God is not. But they have no positive knowledge of what God is, certainly not in a cognitive sense. In short, they are religious agnostics, or acognostics . They may believe in God and feel God, but they have no positive knowledge of what it is they are believing or feeling. They acknowledge a mystical realm, but like Ludwig

Wittgenstein they must remain silent about it. There are at least two serious problems with this position.

First, purely negative knowledge is impossible. One cannot know not-That unless he knows what That is. Likewise, one cannot know what God is not like unless he knows what he is like. Second, since religion, at least in the theistic sense, involves a personal relation with God, it is difficult to understand how one can have this if he knows none of the qualities of the Beloved. In this regard, the atheist Ludwig Feuerbach's comment is appropriate: "Only where man loses his taste for religion, and thus religion itself becomes insipid existence—does the existence of God become an insipid existence—an existence without qualities" (Feuerbach, 15).

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JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

Mythology and the New Testament. Central to higher critical argumentation is the theory that much of the New Testament's picture of Jesus and his teachings evolved over time in the social context and theological meanderings of the early church. Jesus the man became lost in legend and myth, buried under supernatural claims of such events as the virgin birth, miracles, and the resurrection (see RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR). Behind these events were the patterns of Greek and Roman gods. Besides atheists and skeptics, some New Testament scholars have made such charges. Rudolf Bultmann was in the forefront of this view of the New Testament. He insisted that the religious records must be "demythologized," or divested of their mythological "husk" to get at the existential "kernel" of truth.

Bultmann's Demythological Naturalism. At the basis of Bultmann's thought is his theory that Christianity grew from the prescientific worldview of a three-storied universe: The earth is at the center of this worldview, with God and angels in heaven above, and the underworld beneath. The material world was acted upon by supernatural forces from above and below, who intervened in human thoughts and actions (Bultmann, 1). The New Testament documents had to be stripped of this mythological structure, for science had made the supernaturalistic worldview obsolete. Blind acceptance of the New Testament would sacrifice the intellect to accept a view of the world in religion that we deny in everyday life (ibid., 3-4). The only honest way to recite the creeds is to strip the mythological framework from the truth it enshrines.

Bultmann proclaimed confidently that the resurrection is not an event of past history. "For an historical fact which involves a resurrection from the dead is utterly inconceivable" (Bultmann, 38-39). Resuscitation of a corpse is not possible. The objective historicity of the resurrection cannot be verified, no matter how many witnesses are cited. The resurrection is an article of faith. That in itself disqualifies it as a miraculous proof. Finally, similar events are known to mythology (ibid., 39-40).

Since the resurrection is not an event of objective space-time history, it is an event of subjective history. It is an event of faith in the hearts of the early disciples. As such, it is not subject to objective historical verification or falsification. Christ arose from Joseph's tomb only in the faith of the disciples' hearts.

Bultmann's argument can be summarized:

1. Myths are, by nature, more than objective truths; they are transcendent truths of faith.
2. But what is not objective cannot be part of a verifiable space-time world.
3. Therefore, miracles (myths) are not part of the objective space-time world.

Evaluation. Several objections have been offered to Bultmann's mythological naturalism.

Basically, demythologization is built on at least two unproven assumptions: First, miracles are less than historical. Second, miracles can occur in the world without being of the world. Bultmann's view is dogmatic and unverifiable. He has no evidential basis for his assertions. Yet he stands contrary to the overwhelming evidence for the authenticity of the New Testament

documents and the reliability of the witnesses (*see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF). Indeed, it is directly contrary to the New Testament writer Peter’s claim that he was not preaching “cunningly devised myths” (2 Peter 1:16). Rather, he and the other apostles were eyewitnesses. John said much the same at the beginning and end of his Gospel (1:1–3 ; 21:24).

The New Testament is not the literary genre of mythology. C. S. Lewis , himself a writer of fairy tales, noted that “Dr. Bultmann never wrote a gospel.” Lewis asks, “Has the experience of his learned . . . life really given him any power of seeing into the minds of those long dead [who have written Gospels]?” As a living writer, Lewis found his critics usually wrong when they attempted to read his mind. He adds, “the ‘assured results of modern scholarship,’ as to the way in which an old book was written, are ‘assured,’ we may conclude, only because the men who knew the facts are dead and can’t blow the gaff” (Lewis, *Christian Reflections*, 161–63).

Evidence for the New Testament. Other articles show that the New Testament was written by contemporaries and eyewitnesses of the events (cf. Luke 1:1–4) and was not the result of later legend development (*see* BIBLE CRITICISM ; MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ; NEW TESTAMENT DATING ; NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS). The article MIRACLES, MYTH AND , presents the following in greater detail.

New Testament books appeared within the lifetime of eyewitnesses and contemporaries. Luke was written by about 60, only twenty-seven years after Jesus’ death, before Acts in 60–62 (see Hemer, all). First Corinthians was written by 55–56, only twenty-two or twenty-three years after Jesus’ death (cf. 1 Cor. 15:6–8). Even radical New Testament scholar John A. T. Robinson dates basic Gospel records between 40 and 60 (see Robinson).

Given that significant parts of the Gospels and other crucial New Testament books were written before 70, there is no time or way for a legend to develop while the eyewitnesses were still alive to refute the story. A legend takes time and/or remoteness to develop, neither of which were available. Roman historian A. N. Sherwin-White calls the mythological view of the New Testament “unbelievable” (Sherwin-White, 189). Others have noted that the writings of Herodotus enable us to determine the rate at which legends develop. Two generations is too short a period for legendary tendencies to wipe out historical fact (Craig, 101). Julius Müller (1805–1898) challenged scholars of his day to produce even one example where in one generation a myth developed where the most prominent elements are myths (Müller, 29). None have been found.

New Testament stories do not show signs of being mythological. Lewis comments that the accounts are straightforward, unembellished records, written in artless, historical fashion by narrow, unattractive Jews who were blind to the mythical wealth of the pagan world around them (Lewis, *Miracles*, 236). “All I am in private life is a literary critic and historian, that’s my job,” said Lewis. “And I’m prepared to say on that basis if anyone thinks the Gospels are either legends or novels, then that person is simply showing his incompetence as a literary critic. I’ve read a great many novels and I know a fair amount about the legends that grew up among early people, and I know perfectly well the Gospels are not that kind of stuff” (*Christian Reflections*, 209).

Persons, places, and events surrounding the Gospel stories are historical. Luke goes to great pains to note that it was in the days of “Caesar Augustus” (Luke 2:1) that Jesus was born and at later baptized in “the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, . . . Annas and Caiaphas being high priests” (Luke 3:1–2).

Sixth, no Greek or Roman myth spoke of the literal incarnation of a monotheistic God into human form (cf. John 1:1–3 , 14) by way of a literal virgin birth (Matt. 1:18–25), followed by his death and physical resurrection. The Greeks believed in reincarnation into a different mortal body; New Testament Christians believed in resurrection into the same physical body made immortal (cf. Luke 24:37). The Greeks were polytheists , not monotheists as New Testament Christians were.

Stories of Greek gods becoming human via miraculous events like a virgin birth were not prior to but after the time of Christ (Yamauchi). Hence, if there is any influence of one on the other it is the influence of the historical event of the New Testament on the mythology, not the reverse.

Conclusion. The New Testament records show no signs of mythological development. Indeed, the miracle events are surrounded by historical references to real people, places, and times. The New Testament documents and witnesses are too early, too numerous, and too accurate to be charged with writing myths. Only an unjustified antisupernatural bias could ground any conclusion to the contrary (*see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST).

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