

Order-of-Nature Miracles and Specific-Point Miracles

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Introduction

Order-of-Nature Miracles

Specific-Point Miracles

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Specific-Point Miracles*

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Thesis: *The distinction, once understood, is key to seeing how biblical Christianity does not conflict with science.*

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Laplace's reply:

"I have not need of that hypothesis."

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Science: Light dispelling ignorance

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Order-of-nature miracles:

Exceptions to the laws of physics that God must perform to sustain the observed order of nature.

Response

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A: It suggests that, if God created this universe, he created an exquisitely ordered universe, one where at no point does he need to perform regular or periodic miracles to sustain the natural order.

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Q: Does this conflict with the view of God as given in the Bible?

Response

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A: It suggests that if God created this universe, he created an exquisitely ordered universe, one where at no point does he need to perform regular or periodic miracles to sustain the natural order.

Q: Does this conflict with the view of God as given in the Bible?

A: No! (Three points)

Response

Point #1: None of the miracles in the Bible, with the possible exception of creation itself, is an order-of-nature miracle. They are specific-point miracles.

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Specific-point miracles:

Exceptions to the laws of physics that God performs at specific times, not to sustain the observed order of nature, but for other purposes.

Response

Point #1: None of the miracles in the Bible, with the possible exception of creation itself, is an order-of-nature miracle. They are specific-point miracles.

Point #2: It ought not to be surprising that an all-powerful and all-knowing God would create such a thoroughly ordered universe.

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Example: Isaac Newton and planetary orbits

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Example: Isaac Newton and planetary orbits
(Laplace showed that Newton was wrong.)

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Example: Cellular differentiation

Difficulty: what God would do?

But from a human perspective ...

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Point #3: An absence of order-of-nature miracles does not provide strong support for supposing there are no specific-point miracles.

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Example: Normal human development and birth —
The virgin birth of Jesus

Response

Conclusion:

The success of science provides significant support for the thesis that there are no gaps in the order of nature (no order-of-nature miracles), but it is mute with respect to the possibility of specific-point miracles.

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Response: Yes, natural laws are not just descriptions of what normally happens in nature, they tell us what is naturally possible, i.e. what can and will happen if nature is left to itself. But natural laws are *laws of nature*, not necessarily absolute laws. They are absolute only if nature is all there is, but science does not tell us this.

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Response: Miracles reflect the will of a personal agent, and apart from knowledge of its intentions, we have no way of knowing how often the agent will perform miracles, or will perform obvious miracles (obvious even to skeptics).

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Response: This objection basically invokes *the problem of evil* and *the problem of divine hiddenness*. Four notes: (a) These problems do not arise out of science but out of theology and philosophy. (b) If we have reason to believe a miracle has occurred, the evidence for it is not negated by not understanding why obvious miracles don't happen more often.

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Response: (c) In the Bible obvious miracles occur at specific times and through specific people. They are not the norm in biblical history. (d) That obvious miracles (again to skeptics) are not common does not imply a largely "hands-off" God. He can (and it is Christian experience that he does) work in subtle ways on a regular basis.