IV.—HUME'S THEORY OF THE CREDIBILITY OF MIRACLES.

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§1. Hume's *Essay on Miracles* is, perhaps, the most notorious of his works to the non-philosophic but educated public. Yet its notoriety is mainly due to what has been said about it, and to what it is believed to contain. Probably few people read it who are not making a special study of Hume's philosophy. It has always seemed to me to be an over-rated work, and to fall below the extremely high standard of Hume's other philosophical writings. In the present paper I propose to do three things: (*a*) to state Hume's theory as clearly and fairly as possible; (*b*) to discuss its internal consistency and truth; and (*c*) to see how far it is compatible with Hume's own views about causation and belief.

§2. Hume's argument about the credibility of miraculous stories is closely connected with his theory of causation. It may be put as follows. We believe a great many things on testimony, *i.e.*, because other people tell us that they witnessed the events in question. Why do we believe on testimony? It is because a long experience has taught us that, as a rule, people with no special motive for lying, and with no special cause for self-deception, report accurately in the main what they have observed. We ourselves have verified this conjunction between reports and things reported in a number of cases, *e.g.*, a man tells us that he has seen something (X) at the other side of the town. We go and look, and see it for ourselves. Here we have a conjunction between a fact (X) and the man's testimony to the fact. We find such conjunctions to hold in a great many cases, and it is because we

have found this to be so that we generally attach credit to a story if there be no reason for thinking that our informant is specially given to lying or specially liable to make mistakes.

The point that Hume wants us to notice is that our belief in testimony is of exactly the same kind as our belief in causal laws. I believe that A will always be followed by B because I have so often observed A to be followed by B. I believe what a sensible and truthful man tells me as having been witnessed by himself, because in so many cases where I have been able to make the test I have been able to observe what such men have reported to me. We may compare the observed agreements between such men's accounts and the facts in the past with the observed sequences A and B. And we may compare my general belief that their stories are to be accepted with my belief that A will always be followed by B.

§3. Now, Hume says, it is a general principle that we ought to increase our belief in anything proportionally to the amount of evidence for it and to decrease our belief proportionally to the amount of evidence against it. If in 99 cases out of 100 A has been observed to be followed by B, and in one case B was observed not to follow, we very strongly expect A to be followed by B in the next case. But if this sequence has only happened in 50 per cent. of the observed cases, we ought to have no strong expectation of its happening in the next instance. Let us, then, apply this principle to the credibility of stories believed on the evidence of witnesses.

§4. In the first place, the witnesses may conflict with each other. Then we naturally cannot attach much weight to what either party says, because we have just as much cause to believe that the event did not take place as that it did.

But suppose the witnesses all agree in saying that a certain event took place. Then our belief will depend on two factors: (*a*) It will be strengthened by the agreement of the witnesses because we know that, in the majority of cases, when honest and independent witnesses agree in saying that something has

happened, that event has happened; (*b*) It will be strengthened or weakened according as the event reported is one that is in itself likely or unlikely to have happened. If I know that events of the kind which the witnesses report have often happened, I have no reason to doubt what they say. But, if they report something that is quite contrary to what has generally been observed to happen, I ought not to believe at all strongly that they are right. For I shall entertain conflicting states of mind. (*a*) I know that what they report is at variance with what generally happens. Hence I have so far a tendency to believe the contrary of what they report. (*b*) I know that what is reported by a number of honest witnesses is oftener true than false. Hence I have so far a tendency to believe what they report. These two tendencies, both founded on the same general principle and therefore equally justifiable, will have to fight in my mind; and my final state of belief will be a compromise between the two. It will be weaker than if I attended solely to the agreement of the witnesses, and it will be stronger than if I attended solely to the rarity of the event which they report.

§ 5. Let us now suppose that the event which is reported is not merely extraordinary but miraculous. What ought we to believe? Hume defines a miracle as follows: It is a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent. *E.g.*, it would be extraordinary if we were to find a lion in the Great Court at Trinity, or an intelligent and honest man in the Anti-German Union. But such events would not be miracles, because it would be possible to explain even the latter in terms of known laws of nature. It would, however, be a miracle if a lion were to come into my rooms through the keyhole, or a member of the Anti-German Union were to turn Mr. Arthur Ponsonby into a pillar of salt by merely looking at him, for such events are contrary to known laws of nature. Now a law of nature is simply a regularity which has, up to the present,

never been known to fail. So Hume says: Any event that is called a miracle either is of a kind that has been observed in other cases or not. If it has been observed in other cases it is not really a miracle, for it cannot contradict a genuine law of nature. If it never has been observed in other cases it is a genuine miracle, but there is an absolutely uniform experience against it. So if any event could justly be called a miracle and not merely an extraordinary occurrence, it must be one which is contrary to the entire course of experience.

Now suppose that a number of honest people agree in asserting that they witnessed a miracle, an event contrary to the whole course of experience. Then, if we consider the reported event by itself, we have the strongest ground for disbelieving in it that we can possibly have. For we have the strongest possible ground for believing in what is incompatible with it, viz. the ground of an absolutely uniform experience. Let us consider the evidence for it. We cannot say that we have the strongest possible ground for believing what honest witnesses agree in telling us, for we know that there are plenty of cases where such witnesses have been mistaken.

So Hume's argument comes to this. Against belief in any alleged miracle we have, by definition of the word miracle, an absolutely uniform experience. For believing in the miracle we have only our experience as to the trustworthiness of testimony. And this is not an absolutely uniform experience, however trustworthy we may suppose the witnesses to be. Therefore we have never the right to believe in any alleged miracle however strong the testimony for it may be.

§ 6. Hume says that he has here put the case for miracles as strongly as he can, and has shown that, *however good* the testimony may be, we ought not to believe them. He now goes on to show that the testimony for a miracle never really is the best possible. (1) The witnesses to any alleged miracle have never been at once so well educated as to ensure that they shall not be deluding themselves and so unquestionably

honest as to ensure that they are not trying to delude other people. And no alleged miracle has been performed so publicly as to make it certain that no fraud has been employed. (2) Many people have strong motives for believing in miracles. Most people have a fondness for what is wonderful and out of the common, and therefore have a natural tendency to believe any miraculous story on very slight evidence. And a religious enthusiast demands very much less proof for the alleged miracles of his own religion than for those of any other religion or for quite ordinary stories about everyday affairs. (I myself have a Scottish friend who believes all the miracles of the New Testament, but cannot be induced to believe, on the repeated evidence of my own eyes, that a small section of the main North British Railway between Dundee and Aberdeen consists of a single line.) (3) It is rather ominous for miracles that they are almost ostentatiously frequent in barbarous times and among backward peoples, but become fewer and fewer as people become more educated. This strongly suggests that the alleged miracles are due to the ease with which barbaric people are duped by others, and to their lack of knowledge of natural laws which makes them think that many perfectly natural events (*e.g.*, the firing of a gun) are miraculous.

(4) Lastly Hume has a very ingenious argument about religious miracles. Any two religious systems, *e.g.*, Christianity and Mahometanism, are incompatible with each other. Any evidence for a Mahometan miracle tends to support Mahometanism, and therefore tends so far to refute Christianity and thus to discredit the evidence for Christian miracles. Similarly any evidence for a Christian miracle tends to discredit the evidence for Mahometan miracles. Thus the fact that miracles are alleged to occur in a number of incompatible religions tends to decrease the probability that miracles happen anywhere.

This argument is somewhat subtle, and it contains a suppressed premise; so it will be well to state it more formally. Let R_1 and R_2 be two incompatible religions. And let it be

supposed that miracles *only* occur in connexion with *true* religion. (This is the suppressed premise.) Then the assertion, "Miracles occur in connexion with R_1," implies that R_1 is true; this implies that R_2 is false; and this implies that miracles do not occur in connexion with R_2. Similarly the assertion "Miracles occur in connexion with R_2," implies that miracles do not occur in connexion with R_1. Now both these assertions are made (though, of course, by different sets of people). The combined proposition implies its own contradictory and therefore *must* be false, and therefore *one* of the separate assertions *must* be false, and *both* may be. This argument, however, as we have seen, needs the premise that miracles only occur in connexion with true religion. Now this might very well be false, and it is certainly not universally held by people who believe in religious miracles. Thus the early Christians accepted the miracles of Pagan religions, but ascribed them to devils.

Hume's final conclusion, then, is that no human testimony, however strong, ought to make us believe a miracle, and that the actual testimony that we are offered for alleged historical miracles is not even the strongest kind of human testimony.

§ 7. I pass to a consideration of these views. Two distinct questions arise: (*a*) Is Hume right in his arguments and conclusions? (*b*) Are they consistent with his other views, particularly his theories as to belief and causation?

All Hume's arguments to show that the testimony that is actually offered for any particular alleged miracle is untrustworthy seem to me to be sound and important. Investigations made since Hume's time have only strengthened his arguments. We are perhaps less inclined to lay stress on conscious deception carried out "by Priests and Kings for the enslavement of Peoples" than were our forefathers in the eighteenth century. But the careful investigations of the Society for Psychical Research on the extraordinary discrepancies between what intelligent people, who knew that they were looking at

mere conjuring tricks, saw, and what they thought they saw, have shown that we must allow far more for honest self-deception than could possibly have been imagined in Hume's time. And perhaps we may mention the celebrated story of the 80,000 Russians who passed through England at the beginning of the war in the presence of such a cloud of witnesses, as a case which renders it practically impossible in future to accept a miraculous story *merely* on the evidence of *direct* testimony to its truth.

There is, however, a point which needs mentioning before we leave this part of the subject. Sometimes the best evidence for a miracle is not direct testimony, but indirect testimony. Let me explain. Direct testimony to an event X is a statement by some person or persons that they observed X. Indirect testimony to X is a statement by some person or persons that they observed something other than X (say Y), which is judged to be such that it could not have been observed unless X actually took place. This indirect testimony to an alleged miracle *has* a special weakness, and *seems* to have two special sources of strength. Of the latter one is real and the other illusory. The evidence for X, based on indirect testimony, must have any weakness that the evidence for Y has, and it will have the additional weakness that the hypothesis that X actually happened may not be the only or the best explanation of the fact that Y was observed, even if the latter be true. On the other hand, Y may be quite a commonplace event, whilst X is a very extraordinary one. This does actually strengthen indirect testimony for X through Y, as against direct testimony for X, because the testimony for Y will not be vitiated by such factors as love of the wonderful, religious enthusiasm, etc., which tend to cast suspicion on the direct testimony for X. It also *seems* to strengthen the indirect testimony for X through Y, as against the direct testimony for X, because the intrinsic probability of Y will be much greater than that of X. But, in the

long run, it does not do so. The testimony to Y only supports X in so far as the occurrence of X is the hypothesis that best explains the occurrence of Y. But the credibility of an hypothesis depends not merely on its ability to explain admitted facts, but also on its intrinsic probability. Thus the intrinsic improbability of X is as relevant to attempts to establish X through indirect testimony as to attempts to establish it through direct testimony. Still, on balance, a story of a miraculous event may be rendered much more probable by indirect than by direct testimony.

An example is provided by the story of the Resurrection in the Christian religion. The direct testimony for this event appears to me to be very feeble. It would be absurd, surely, to say that we have as good direct evidence for it as for the false story of the 80,000 Russians. But the indirect evidence is much stronger.* We have testimony to the effect that the disciples were exceedingly depressed at the time of the Crucifixion; that they had extremely little faith in the future: and that, after a certain time, this depression disappeared, and they believed that they had evidence that their Master had risen from the dead. Now none of these alleged facts is in the least odd or improbable, and we have therefore little ground for not accepting them on the testimony offered us. But having done this, we are faced with the problem of accounting for the facts which we have accepted. What caused the disciples to believe, contrary to their previous conviction, and in spite of their feeling of depression, that Christ had risen from the dead? Clearly one explanation is that he actually had risen. And this explanation accounts for the facts so well that we may at least say that the indirect evidence for the miracle is far and away stronger than the direct evidence.

On the other hand, it does not seem to me that even the indirect evidence is strong in such a case. Such strength as

* These points are excellently brought out in Samuel Butler's *Fair Haven*.

it has springs from two roots: (*a*) The explanation does account for the facts which we have accepted on testimony; (*b*) No other explanation that has been put forward can be said to account equally well for them. But against this it must be said (*a*) that the miraculous explanation is intrinsically the least probable that can be put forward; and (*b*) that, in the present case, the failure of alternative explanations does not just leave the miraculous explanation standing alone; it leaves it with an indefinite number of other explanations which our lack of all detailed knowledge of the events immediately following the Crucifixion prevents us from formulating. We know that our state of ignorance is such that it is compatible with the existence of some quite simple explanation, and with the fact that no one will ever hit on this explanation.*

With these remarks we may leave Hume's special argument and pass to his general one.

§ 8. Hume's general argument against miracles seems to me to be weak in a number of ways. His definition of a miracle is very peculiar. He refuses to call an event a miracle unless it be the only event of the kind that has ever been known to happen. This is involved in his saying that a genuine miracle must contradict the *whole* course of experience. But surely there may be several events of the same kind which are all miracles, and all miraculous because of a single common

* It is understood that the story of the 80,000 Russians originated through some third person reading a private telegram from a Russian to an English egg merchant. The words were, "80,000 Russians are coming"; and they referred to eggs, not to soldiers. A future historian, trying to account for the strange belief current in England in 1914, would hardly think of this explanation; and, if he put it forward as a conjecture, it would appear wild as compared with the hypothesis that the Russians actually did pass through England. There may be some equally simple explanation of the stories about the Resurrection; the true explanation may even have been hit upon by some sceptical biblical critic, and yet have been rejected by himself and others as too absurdly inadequate to account for the facts.

circumstance. If Samuel was raised from the dead by the Witch of Endor, and if Lazarus was raised from the dead by Christ, these were both miracles. And they were both miracles of the same kind, viz., contraventions of the natural law that when once a man dies he remains dead. It seems as if Hume would have to say that, if anybody has ever been raised from the dead, it was a miracle on the first occasion, because it contradicted all previous experience; but that, if it ever happened again, the second case would not be a miracle, because it did not contradict *all* previous experience. And then, I suppose, he would have to go back to the first case and deny that even this was really a miracle, because he would now say that it is not a genuine law of nature that people never come to life again after they are dead. I suppose that Hume's position really is that all miracles are solitary exceptions to some law of nature ; but that you can never be sure that a solitary exception to some alleged law of nature is a miracle, because another exception may arise, and this will prove that we were not really concerned with a law of nature at all. This is not a satisfactory definition of a miracle. (*a*) It is, as we have seen, incompatible with the common view that miracles of the same kind may recur and be none the less miracles. (*b*) Unless miracles are to be ruled out as contradictions in terms—in which case the rest of Hume's arguments would be pointless—he must admit that a regularity does not cease to be a law of nature through a single alleged exception. But, if so, it seems arbitrary to suppose that two or three exceptions to a regularity necessarily prove that it is not a law of nature, and consequently that none of the exceptions are miraculous. (*c*) If this be granted, the important part of Hume's definition of a miracle will be that the event is caused by a particular volition of the Deity or by the interposition of some invisible agent; and this part of the definition is ignored in his subsequent argument.

§ 9. If we take Hume's argument seriously we get into

difficulties over cases where no one supposes that there is a miracle. Clearly many propositions have been accounted laws of nature because of an invariable experience in their favour, then exceptions have been observed, and finally these propositions have ceased to be regarded as laws of nature. But the first reported exception was, to anyone who had not himself observed it, in precisely the same position as a story of a miracle, if Hume be right. Those, then, to whom the first exception was reported ought to have rejected it, and gone on believing in the alleged law of nature. Yet, if the report of the first exception makes *no* difference to their belief in the law, their state of belief will be precisely the same when a second exception is reported as it was on the first occasion. Hence, if the first report ought to make no difference to their belief in the law, neither ought the second. So that it would seem on Hume's theory that if, up to a certain time, I and every one else have always observed A to be followed by B, then no amount of testimony from the most trustworthy persons that they have observed A not followed by B ought to have the least effect on my belief in the law.

It might of course be said that I could examine the alleged exceptions for myself or explain them by other natural laws, and that then I ought to believe them. But the point is that if I acted as Hume seems to think I ought to act I should have no motive for doing either. My only motive for investigating alleged exceptions or trying to explain them is that the report of them has made me doubtful of the law. Yet, if the testimony of others does not shake my belief in the law, there is no reason for me to think that there is anything that needs explanation or investigation. If scientists had actually proceeded in this way, some of the most important natural laws would never have been discovered. For the people who discover exceptions to alleged general laws are seldom the same people as explain them. The former are often mere experimentalists and the latter mere mathematicians. Hence, if

Hume were right, the people who could see that these were exceptions could not explain them; and the people who could explain them could not be persuaded that they exist.

Perhaps it will be contended that I am unfair to Hume here. It may be urged that, on his theory, my belief in a law, even when one exception only has been reported, cannot be precisely the same as it was before. It may be said that all that he means is that one reported exception, however well attested, ought never to reduce my belief in the law so far as to change it to doubt or disbelief, though it must reduce my belief to some extent. This does seem to me to be the natural consequence of Hume's theory of belief and probability. But what follows? If one reported exception does reduce my belief in the law to some extent, how can we be sure that it will never reduce it from belief to doubt or disbelief? Hume's reply is that this is because we have only testimony, which, at its best, is not invariably trustworthy, to put against an experience which has *ex hypothesi* been so far uniform. But now suppose that a second exception is reported to me. My own experience in favour of the law is still uniformly favourable; my knowledge that the best human testimony is not invariably trustworthy has undergone no change. Why then should my belief in the law be further reduced by the testimony to the second exception than it was by the testimony to the first? If my own experience in favour of the law and my own experience of the general characteristics of human testimony be, as Hume seems to suggest, the only operative factors, the same startling results follow from the present milder interpretation of Hume's theory as from the earlier and more rigid one. If, on the other hand, concurrent testimony to *two* similar events may reduce my belief in a law to doubt or disbelief, in spite of my uniform experience in its favour, how can I possibly be sure that *no* amount of testimony to *one* such event can possibly reduce my belief so far? And, if I cannot be sure of

this, how can I lay down the principle that *no* amount of testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle in Hume's sense of the word?

§ 10. Hume does not seem to notice that our belief in many natural laws rests mainly on testimony. There are many natural laws in which we all believe, but of which most of us have observed very few instances. *E.g.*, our belief that we shall die rests largely on testimony; most of us have met with very few cases of death in our own experience. So the evidence for and against an alleged miracle is mainly a matter of testimony against testimony. Nobody, *e.g.*, has had enough personal experience of death to make it reasonable for him to judge, simply from the regularity of his own experience, that a dead man never rises again. Our strong belief on this point is almost wholly due to the practically uniform testimony of other people. But we also know that there are a few accounts of men being raised from the dead. The position, therefore, is this. There is an enormous amount of testimony in favour of the view that all men once dead remain dead. There is a very little testimony in favour of the view that some dead men have risen again.

Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that the testimony on one side seems as trustworthy as that on the other, and that the only difference is the amount of it on each side. Then we could interpret the fact in two ways. We might say: (*a*) It is not an absolutely general law of nature that all men once dead remain dead. Or we might say: (*b*) It is a general law of nature that all men once dead remain dead; but, in a few cases, this law has been contravened by a miracle. What would be the precise difference between these two interpretations of the facts?

§11. If we examined all the cases where people did come to life again and found that they had something common and peculiar to them we need not suppose a miracle. Let the common quality be *q*. Then we should merely have to modify

our general law and say: All men, except those who have the quality q, remain dead when they are once dead. This law would have no exceptions. And the resurrection of the persons with the quality q would not be a miracle, but merely an instance of another general law, viz.: All men who have the quality q can be raised from the dead.

It must be noticed that some explanation of this kind is always theoretically possible. It is therefore true to say that no testimony, however good, will *necessitate* a belief in a miracle. It is always possible (and nearly always reasonable), even if the alleged exceptional cases be admitted, to hold that they have some common and peculiar characteristic, though this may be too minute or obscure for us to detect.

§12. The other interpretation of the facts comes to this. The amount of testimony in favour of the law is so great that it seems reasonable to go on believing that the law is general. The exceptional cases have no common and peculiar quality that I can observe. If I conclude that they *really* have none, and wish to keep my belief in the law, I must suppose that the exceptions are due to the occasional interference of some supernatural force with nature. This practically means some agent acting upon matter or mind in the same direct way as that in which our minds apparently act on themselves and on our own bodies. It is not necessary to assume that this force obeys no laws; we should still call events due to the direct volitions of God, or an angel or devil or magician, miracles, even if we knew that these volitions obeyed among themselves psychological laws. To say that a law of nature is true, but that there are miraculous exceptions to it, comes, therefore, to this: the law is true independently of all conditions in the material world, but it may be suspended by something acting upon matter or other minds in the same direct way as our minds seem to act on our bodies and on themselves.

The notion of a miracle belongs mainly to popular thought. We cannot, therefore, expect to give a perfectly satisfactory definition of it. What seems clear is: (*a*) That the mere rarity of an event is not enough to make it count as a miracle; though, on the other hand, extreme frequency would probably hinder any event from being called miraculous. (*b*) If the instances of the event have something common and peculiar to them, more especially if this be a material quality, the events will not be called miracles. (*c*) The epithet "miraculous" involves a special interpretation of the causation of an event which *need* never be assumed. But, when it is assumed, it always seems to contain a reference to the direct action of a mind on other minds or on foreign matter. I think we may fairly say then that we have no sufficient evidence for supposing that a miracle has ever been performed in the course of history; but, at the same time, we have no sufficient evidence for saying that miracles cannot happen. The trouble about miracles, as it seems to me, is not that no evidence *could* prove one, but that no evidence *has* proved one.

§ 13. It remains to say something as to the consistency of Hume's theory about miracles with his own views about belief and causation. Hume has told us that he can find no logical ground for induction. He cannot see why it should be justifiable to pass from a frequent experience of A followed by B, to a belief that A always will be followed by B. All that he professes to do is to tell us that we actually do make this transition, and to explain psychologically how it comes about. Now, this being so, I cannot see how Hume can distinguish between our variously caused beliefs about matters of fact, and call some of them justifiable and others unjustifiable.

Hume refuses to believe in a reported miracle, because it contradicts a constant experience of A followed by B, which has led to a strong belief that A always will be followed by B. A religious enthusiast believes a miracle because of a

natural tendency to believe what is wonderful and what makes for the credit of his religion. In each case we know the psychological cause of the belief. Hume's disbelief is due to his natural tendency to pass from the constant experience of A followed by B to the belief that A will always be followed by B. The enthusiast's belief is due to his natural tendency to believe what is wonderful and what makes for the credit of his religion. But Hume has admitted that he sees no logical justification for beliefs in matters of fact which are merely caused by a regular experience. Hence the enthusiast's belief in miracles and Hume's belief in natural laws (and consequent disbelief in miracles) stand on precisely the same logical footing. In both cases we can see the psychological cause of the belief, but in neither can Hume give us any logical ground for it.

We see, then, that Hume is really inconsistent in preferring a belief in the laws of nature based on constant experience to a belief in miracles based on the love of the wonderful. The inconsistency slips in when Hume says, not merely that we *do* tend to believe propositions with a strength proportional to the amount of experience and testimony in favour of them, but also that we *ought* to proportion our belief in this way. The first part of his statement is refuted by the case of the enthusiast, the second is rendered useless for him by his own sceptical theory of induction. On his own theories he has no right to talk about what we *ought* to believe as to matters of fact. For what we ought to believe means what we are logically justified in believing, and Hume has said that he can find no logical justification for beliefs about matters of fact.

Probably the cause of this inconsistency in Hume was somewhat as follows:—He seems to have thought that, as a matter of fact, there is some kind of harmony between our minds and the course of nature, so that, when a constant conjunction of A and B in our experience leads us to believe in a law connecting A and B in nature, this belief is actually quite

often true, though we cannot give any logical justification for it. On the other hand, Hume, like everyone else, knew that beliefs which are caused merely by prejudice, or enthusiasm, or love of the wonderful, are as often false as true. So probably he would have stated his position somewhat as follows:—I cannot pretend to offer any logical justification for your belief that A will always be followed by B which is caused by your constant experience of A followed by B; but, all the same, we do seem to be so far in harmony with nature that beliefs caused in this way have, up to the present, turned out to be much oftener right than wrong. But beliefs caused by mere prejudice, or enthusiasm, or love of the wonderful, have, even up to the present, turned out to be much oftener wrong than right. So a wise man will believe that A will be followed by B with a strength proportional to the regularity of his experience of A followed by B, and will not let himself attach much weight to alleged exceptions which flatter his love of the wonderful or his religious enthusiasm. It is true that he cannot give satisfactory logical grounds for his belief that A will always be followed by B; but he can give reasons for doubting alleged exceptions, since he knows that religious enthusiasm and love of the wonderful have no tendency to lead to true belief about matters of fact, and have often led to false ones. Indeed, whilst we cannot see why any of the causes that lead to our belief about matters of fact should lead to true belief, we can see that all such causes, except the regularity of our past experiences, have a strong tendency to lead to false ones.

Such a position is, I think, self-consistent. The only thing to be said is that it ought not to lead us to such a strong belief in any of the alleged laws of nature as to make us at once reject an alleged exception, no matter how good the testimony for it may be. We ought to be very slow indeed in admitting an alleged exception to a well-established law; and it may well be that there never has been good enough

evidence for a reasonable man to accept any alleged miracle. But we have no right to say off-hand with Hume that no possible evidence *could* make it reasonable to suppose that a miraculous exception to some law of nature had taken place; and Hume, with his views of induction, has less right to say this than most people.