

Is there room in BioLogos to believe in miracles?



Introduction

Miracles are generally defined as God's special involvement in a situation. God's interaction with the world, however, does not require physical laws to be broken. For the purposes of this response, the term miracle will entail God's suspension or interruption of physical law.

There are several important questions: Is it logically possible to believe in miracles and BioLogos? Does a scientific explanation of a miracle explain it away? Can God be involved in situations that are scientifically explicable?

The Simple Response

Miracles are possible from the perspective of a believer given that God is the creator and sustainer of all physical laws and has the ability to suspend those laws. Regardless of God's method of creation, miraculous interaction is always an option for the creator and sustainer of the physical laws.

Explaining Away Miracles

Do scientific explanations demote events from miraculous to natural? If God suspends the laws of nature for any event, it is certainly a miracle. But it is also possible for humans to perceive a complicated series of natural events as miraculous, when no laws have actually been broken. Something thus deemed miraculous can later be understood in terms of the laws of nature. This does not prove God's absence from the situation; God's involvement is still possible. However, given our definition of a miracle as law-suspending, a scientific explanation removes an event's miraculous status.

Divine Action

Can God be involved in situations that are scientifically explicable? After all, shouldn't supernatural interactions resist natural explanation? Consider, for example, the Old Testament story of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea:

"Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided. The sons of Israel went through the midst of the sea on the dry land, and the waters were like a wall to them on their right hand and on their left." ¹

A scientific explanation of the event — the strong east wind — hardly takes away its miraculous status because the wind is credited to God. Although laws of nature were not necessarily broken, God was still involved in timing the Israelite's arrival with a wind that provided them with passage.

But does God bringing the wind forth merely push the question of miracle farther back? If weather forecasters could have predicted that wind, could God have been involved in bringing it about?

Given quantum uncertainty, science cannot explain or even predict the exact long term behavior of nature's most complicated systems, and the weather is certainly one of those systems. There would always be room, from the perspective of science, for God to have caused a scientifically undetectable miracle by working within the finer, subtler details of any event. But we must be careful not to carry this argument to the extent of inserting God into the many little — and some not so little — gaps in our scientific understanding of nature. For processes that are susceptible to ultimate scientific explanation, calling such currently unexplained events miracles runs the risk of being a God-of-the-Gaps theology.

If our steadily improving scientific understanding can fully explain events, how can we say that God

was involved in those events? This is the central theological problem of divine action, an animated conversation in the philosophy of religion. Is it possible that the laws of nature are open in a way that allows for divine interaction, without leaving signs of broken or suspended natural laws?

Conclusion

This response provides a simple answer to the question of miracles, namely that BioLogos does not in any way remove the logical possibility of miracles. However, for the universe to behave in an apparently ordered fashion, such events must be rare. BioLogos is thus compatible with many faiths that have miraculous events at the center of their doctrine. Finally, although a scientific explanation does in fact take away a phenomenon's miraculous status, it does not establish that God was not involved in the process.

Consulted Experts:

The BioLogos Foundation is grateful for the assistance of [Owen Gingerich](#) in drafting this response.

Notes

1. Exodus 14: 21-22 (NASB).

Further Reading

Online

- The Faraday Institute for Science and Religion. [Lectures on Divine Action](#).

Books

- Humphreys, Colin. *The Miracles of Exodus*. London: Continuum, 2003.
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