ON THE HERMENEUTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF HUME'S ESSAY, OF MIRACLES

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Introduction

In the first part of this paper I propose that David Hume, in his philosophizing about history and the sciences, allows for a counterpart in respect of belief to the contemporary Heidegger-Gadamer hermeneutic circle of pre-understanding and understanding in respect of meaning. In doing so he points to one way in which all science, no matter how 'hard' is yet subject to the flow of history and partakes of our human finitude. Here as in other respects he brings the activity of science home to human nature.

1 This is a development of an idea to be found also in David Fate Norton, Introductory Essay in David Hume: Philosophical Historian, edited, with Introductory Essays, by David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis 1965), pp. xlviii-l. One difference with Norton is that I do not think the circle is particularly sceptical in its consequences. What it means is that we do not have an absolute, unconditioned, unsituated access to truth. The analogy is with the Heideggerian circle of pre-understanding and understanding rather than the parts and whole circle of classical hermeneutics.

2 The other ways include: (1) the study of the human understanding in Book I of the Treatise and the first Enquiry — reason as something incapable of justifying itself, a kind of instinct, far from some god-like faculty, differing in degree, not in kind from what is found among the animals; it is nature which determines us to judge as well as to breathe and to feel (T 183), which is just as well, otherwise scepticism would have the final triumph; (2) the study of the passions in Book II of the Treatise, including the passions which are the source of all our enquiries (T 448ff.); (3) the study of the moral worth of the abilities exemplified in good philosophy towards the end of Book III of the Treatise (T 606ff.); (4) the sustained endeavour after the Treatise to combine together good philosophy and fine writing, to please as well as to convince, to work towards a togetherness of content, method, literary form and style of writing — the philosopher working also as rhetorician. Doing philosophy is not some kind of sharing in divine knowledge or an anticipation of heaven or the dissertation of some transcendental ego.
the second part of the paper I outline the ways in which the situatedness of scientific and historical reflection might influence contemporary assessments from a religious perceptive of Hume's eighteenth century treatment of miracles. The references in the text to Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* [T] and *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals* [EHU] are to the Selby-Bigge (Oxford) editions; EHU as revised by P.H. Nidditch (1975).

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The main idea in Hume's hermeneutic of belief is that what we come to believe on the basis of our own experience and the testimony of others is in part a function of what we have already come to believe on these same bases. The interesting point is that, as Hume makes clear at a certain point, this latter sort of belief is contingent, a function of our particular past history. As with interpretation of meanings, what we end up with in history or the sciences is a function of something similar to what Gadamer has since come to call our "prejudices".3

I would like to illustrate this claim by reference to Hume's usage of a rule of methodology that some scholars nowadays term, the *Principle of Relative Likelihood*. It is often necessary for the scholar in history or the sciences to invoke past experience and testimony, and, crucially, causal principles based on these, in deciding what to believe presently in respect of certain matters of fact. The sorts of experience and where relevant, testimony4 invoked and the *principles* used are of two kinds: (1) those

Doing philosophy (science, history) is a particular form of activity, with its own peculiar values, in which certain kinds of people occupy themselves, motivated by passions not all that different from the passions that motivate other activities (such as hunting and gambling). It serves to illustrate and exercise certain esteemed traits of character, and which (post-*Treatise*) is to be done in such a way as to please and even to entertain.

4 "where relevant, testimony": while our reliance on testimony is itself based on experience (EHU X, pp. 111-112), most of what we know about human beings according to Hume is in fact based more directly on testimony. Compare what Hume has to say about the value of history for
having to do with the likelihood, either in general or in particular, of the content of what is presented for belief; and (2) those having to do with the reliability, in general or in particular, of the media by means of which a content is conveyed to us, either our own senses — we do sometimes disbelieve our senses — or more usually human testimony of one kind or another. In this latter case, the scholar compares the likelihood or otherwise of the event having happened with the likelihood or otherwise of the media being mistaken, or as Hume would have it, he or she subtracts one probability from the other. It is only in those instances where the media’s being mistaken would be more improbable than the occurrence of the event in question that a wise person accepts the event as having occurred, and then only with a degree of belief proportional to the degree of probability which remains. Or, much more briefly, he always accept the "lesser miracle" (cf.

the sciences of man, EHU 83-84; and especially the 1741 essay "Of the Study of History", "... we should be for ever children in understanding, were it not for this invention, which extends our experience to all past ages...", Of the Standard of Taste and Other Essays, edited by John W. Lenz (Indianapolis 1965), p.97. This includes some portion of our assurance in respect of at least some of the principles of human nature relevant to the discernment of testimony itself — compare some of the arguments used by Hume himself in EHU Section X Part II, e.g. "The many instances of forged miracles, and prophecies, and supernatural events, which in all ages, have either been detected by contrary evidence, or which detect themselves by their absurdity, prove sufficiently the strong propensity of mankind to the extraordinary and the marvellous, and ought reasonably to beget a suspicion against all relations of this kind..." (EHU 118). In respect of the extent of our reliance in fact on testimony, the same would probably go for our assurance of most of the laws of physical nature. This would be the case not only for lay people but even for scientists outside their particular discipline. What happens "in the common course of nature" (EHU 115) I find out as much if not more from other people as from my own personal experience. We use other people to extend our store of experience of nature and not only of other people. And of course there are fairly obvious cases in which testimony is allowed to over-rule experience in quite a direct fashion, e.g. a traveller taking the word of another more experienced traveller that what he took to be a lake is really only a mirage. One could hardly imagine Hume disallowing this. This for people who think I am making it up when I ascribe to Hume such a very general principle instead of some suitably restricted version.
EHU 116). This is the Principle of Relative Likelihood in its most general form. The interesting thing for our purposes in the first part of this paper is that the belief formed in this way is a function of what we already believe (which is, in turn, a function of the experiences and testimony we have already been exposed to), and that this latter, as Hume acknowledges, is a contingent matter.

As already noted, the methodological rule comes into play when there is some question about the likelihood of the event or the reliability of the media. The methodological rule itself is to be conceived as grounded in human nature, a methodization which serves to re-enforce the general and more authentic principles which operate also in common life (cf. EHU 162, and T 225). It could conceivably be justified in much the same way as other such rules, viz, as the methodization of strong principles which are necessary or at least useful for the conduct of life (cf. T 225), even though, as in the case of the Indian prince (see below), it sometimes leads us to reject for the time being what is in fact the truth. This paper will not however concern itself with the details of this.

Hume's treatment of miracles in Section X, Part I of An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding is, I suggest, a good example of the application of a version of this methodological rule. This is also the place where the elaboration and justification of the rule is most clearly to be found. In this paper I concentrate all my attention on this section. But there are other examples, e.g. the Political Discourse "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations" (1752) (G&G III, pp. 381-442; Norton and Popkin, pp. 77-108), also the unpublished essay "Of the Poems of Ossian", probably written 1775 (N&P p.389). Indeed, its application in the case of miracles is in some respects peculiar. While the methodological rule generally involves us in the flow of history, so to speak, it turns out that because of the peculiarities of the way a miracle is defined, the 'flow of history' will make no difference in the case of miracles. In the second half of the paper, I will make a suggestion for a logical way out even so for people still interested in believing in miracles, without contesting the rule itself.

Without pushing the point too hard, the circle of belief already acquired largely on the basis of testimony goes some way towards the developing of a more sophisticated or at least more realistic philosophy of the practice of history and the sciences than is usually credited to Hume. The historian is not a completely detached observer standing apart from the history which he or she records, let alone some Absolute Spirit up in the clouds, but a human knower situated in the flow of history. This impression of situatedness is enhanced by a very interesting example which Hume gives in the lead up to his argument on miracles: the example of the Indian prince, who quite reasonably according to Hume "refused to believe the first relations concerning the effects of frost", viz, that water solidifies when it gets very cold, because he had never seen water freezing, and arguing by analogy from what he had seen, he believed that the liquidity of water is seemingly unaffected by change in temperature. (EHU 113-114, and footnote on p. 114.) Unlike a miracle, the kind of event alleged was not strictly contrary to his experience, the prince never having seen water that cold; but nor was it conformable to his particular past experience, and this latter was enough for him to justify his initial disbelief and to reasonably require very strong testimony to engage his assent to the facts.

What makes the application of the rule to the case of reports of miracles impervious to the flow of history is the way in which a 'miracle' is defined, as "a violation of the laws of nature". This terminology of 'laws' and 'laws of nature' is rather rare in Hume's writings, Hume more usually talking of 'causes' and 'general causes', 'principles' and 'general principles' (e.g. EHU 30-31). Whatever it means, one of the criteria for a principle to qualify as a 'law of nature' is that we should have "firm and unalterable experience" (EHU 114) in its favour. By definition, then, a miracle is as unlikely as our experience can make it, there is a "direct and full proof" from experience against it. If it should turn out after all that there is some experience in favour of such events happening or if some such experience should come to light, then of course we do not after all have a 'law of nature' and the event no longer qualifies as a miracle. "Nothing is esteemed a miracle, if it ever happens in the common course of nature."

Hume's argument in An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section X, Part I, in summary is as follows. The wise person proportions his belief to the evidence. In the case of miracles there are two lots of evidence, one respecting the reliability of testimony, the other respecting the law of nature supposedly violated. The wise person calculates the one (EHU
114, first paragraph: with respect to testimony, for the sake of the argument allow it to amount to an entire proof); then he or she calculates the other (the next paragraph, EHU 114-115: the evidence for the law of nature and consequently against any miracle, which by definition will amount to a direct and full proof); the person subtracts the one from the other, and either suspends judgement or inclines one way or the other in proportion to the degree of force which remains. Hume concludes as follows:

"The plain consequence is (and it is a general maxim worthy of our attention), 'That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavours to establish; and even in that case there is a mutual destruction of arguments, and the superior only gives us an assurance suitable to that degree of force, which remains, after deducting the inferior.' When anyone tells me, that he saw a dead man restored to life, I immediately consider with myself, whether it be more probable, that this person should either deceive or be deceived, or that the fact, which he relates, should really have happened. I weigh the one miracle against the other; and according to the superiority, which I discover, I pronounce my decision, and always reject the greater miracle. If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates; then, and not till then, can he pretend to command my belief or opinion." (EHU 115-116)

6 I am adopting what has come to be called the "traditional interpretation" of Section X, Part I, according to which Hume is not trying to prove miracles are impossible but just that testimony, however strong, could never make it reasonable to believe that a miracle had occurred. Cf. Robert J. Fogelin, "What Hume Actually Said About Miracles", Hume Studies Volume XVI Number 1, April 1990, p.81 for the terminology. Fogelin goes on to argue that the traditional interpretation is mistaken, claiming that Hume is also arguing against the very possibility of a miracle. I believe Fogelin fails to notice how the argument of Part I is structured, in particular that it all builds up to the final paragraph ("The plain consequence is ..."). The decision of what to believe and with what degree of assurance is at the end of the process, not on the way through — otherwise you could just as well accept the first direct and full proof, in favour of the testimony, and consequently of the miracle. Hume's claim is that, in the nature of the case, this final decision which is the one which counts is highly likely to be against the miracle and even if in favour not with a very strong degree of assurance. (There is a
In Part II, Hume goes on to argue that, for a variety of reasons, no testimony for any kind of miracle in favour of a system of religion has ever amounted to a probability in respect of its reliability, let alone the kind of proof required to even balance out its, by definition, unlikelihood. Indeed, given certain principles of human nature (having to do particularly with the "passion of surprise and wonder", EHU 117ff.) which determine the response of human beings to reports of extraordinary events, it is unreasonable to believe that it ever could amount to such proof.

Whatever the validity of Hume's arguments in the *Enquiry*, the context of the debate about miracles has changed since Hume's day. For theologians such as John Hick7 or Hans Kung8 and others who are happy to profess and indeed to insist that God works for salvation within and by the other religious traditions as well as their own, and even outside of all religions, Hume's 'contrary miracles' argument in Part II (EHU 121ff.) is not so much wrong as irrelevant.9 Apologetics, whether for religion as such or for a particular religious way, to the extent that it still exists in main line
certain partiality in the way Hume construes the 'plain consequence' however — see below, reference to Barry Gower article in same edition of *Hume Studies.*

9 For a fairly recent treatment of the 'contrary miracles' argument, cf. J.C.A. Gaskin, "Contrary Miracles Concluded", in *Hume Studies*, 10th Anniversary Issue, 1985 Supplement, pp. 1-14. In terms of Gaskin's conclusion (p.13), biblical miracles are no longer taken as "... happenings indicating the exclusive revelation of the one true God in Christianity" in so far as we no longer believe in the latter. Cf. Kung, *op. cit.*, p.100, "Not exclusiveness, but uniqueness". The belief of the Christian (in one God and in Jesus Christ his only Son) may "preclude(s) the possibility that other divinities exist through whom or by whom other miracles could be performed" Gaskin, p.7, but is not taken to exclude the possibility that the God believed in by the Christian and the Divine Word (and even the Risen Christ, not to mention the Holy Spirit) are at work within the other religions also. The logic which the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. 1, 1-2) (and indeed Jesus himself in respect of casting out demons, Mt. 12, 27) applies to Judaism is now applied to the other religions as well.
Christianity, nowadays makes much less use of miracles. They are hardly mentioned for instance in Hans Kung's two books, *Does God Exist?* and *On being a Christian*, for example.¹⁰ The logic of supporting commitment to a particular religious way of living is thought by some to be more like the logic of supporting a super paradigm in science or a very general metaphysical system, rather than that of supporting a series of isolated statements of fact or low level empirical hypotheses.¹¹

The context of Hume's argumentation in this respect is 'subject to the flow of history'. But what of the arguments themselves? Whatever the character of contemporary apologetics, how might someone who wanted to develop an argument in favour of miracles logically respond to Hume's Part I argument?

One way is that presented recently by Barry Gower.¹² Gower argues that Hume's ideas about probability, judged from our point of view, are questionable and misguided and furthermore that in his application of these ideas to miracles he is inconsistent, telling only half the story.¹³ In Hume's day, modern ideas on probability and the calculation of probabilities were still in process of development. Hume's involvement with now outmoded views is shown, for instance, in the fact that Hume subtracts, unfavourable from favourable, where we would be inclined to make a ratio. In accordance with Hume's ideas, the probability of a coin coming up heads, taking unfavourable from favourable for a large sample (15), is close enough to

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¹³ *Ibid.*, p.23: "The cogency of these ideas is, no doubt, questionable; but however misguided ..."; p.28, "So, despite the studied rehearsal of the principles of probabilistic reasoning as applied to the question of miracle, Hume relied on rhetoric rather than those principles for his conclusion. Everything that he said in the final paragraph of Part I of the essay about the credibility of testimony for miracles can be said about evidence for laws, and it becomes apparent that he ignored miracle testimony rather than answered it ..."
zero. Secondly, in respect of the application of Hume's probabilistic reasoning to miracles, the calculation should allow of a contrary conclusion. A suspense of judgement situation in respect of a miracle can be calculated as a suspense of judgement in respect of the relevant law of nature. Indeed, any significant argument from testimony for miracles should be construed as weakening our assurance in respect of the law of nature. This has a number of interesting consequences which Gower himself does not go into. It means for example that if a believer did come up with a good enough argument from testimony, he would find that he no longer had a law of nature which could be violated and consequently no longer a miracle. Which is to say that Hume is not so much proving miracles incredible as defining belief in them to be impossible since internally incoherent. Furthermore, the failure to draw these, perhaps unwelcome, conclusions, allows Hume to pick off miracles one at a time without any lessening of assurance in the relevant laws or, consequent on this, any increment in the calculation in favour of particular kinds of miracles.

One could also go the way of Bruce Langtry in the same edition of Hume Studies. According to Langtry, Hume's logic in Section X Part I is susceptible to a number of convincing counter-examples, including one used recently (1980) by Robert Hambourger. According to Hume's logic, it would not be reasonable to believe on the basis of a newspaper report that such and such a person has won a particular lottery. The odds against a given person winning a lottery are a few million to one against (depending on the lottery!). The odds against newspapers making mistakes in reporting such things are probably considerably less than this. The attempt to escape such examples by means of a distinction between probability of chances and probability of causes (the methodological rule supposedly applying only to the latter) also fails. Even if it succeeded, the logic would succumb to other just as intuitively convincing counter-examples:

"Suppose that published medical statistics say that, over that past twenty years, of 18-year old women who smoke heavily, 1 in 5000 have a heart attack before reaching their 21st birthday. Suppose also that all we know about Winifred is that she is an 18-year old woman who smokes heavily. In that case our best estimate of the probability that Winifred will have a heart attack before reaching her 21st birthday is 1/5000. Presumably

Hume would classify this as probability of causes rather than probability of chances. Now suppose that Winifred is listed on a hospital printout of heart attack patients. Such printouts have in the past been found contain incorrect names in 1 in every 3000 cases.¹⁵

According to Hume's logic, we should take the one probability from the other and disbelieve rather than believe the printout.

I find these arguments of Gower and Langtry fascinating and convincing, so far as they go. In defence of Hume, however, it could be said that the unwelcome consequences derive from Hume's methodization and correction of what he understands to be common ways of reasoning. It could be that either the details of the methodization or Hume's understanding of the common ways of reasoning are faulty, or both; and that a good argument against miracles might still be produced with a logic based on these common ways of proceeding accurately understood.¹⁶ Evaluation and development of this possible line of argument, has to be left to those who know more about the logic of probabilities. There is, however, another way in which a believer might seek to meet Hume's criticisms.

In respect of this other way, a few preliminary comments are in order. First, it has to be noted that a person who believes in only one miracle is probably a rather rare animal. Secondly, the notion of 'a violation of the laws of nature' is at most only part of the concept of a miracle. Not any old violation of the laws of nature will do. A meaningless violation of the laws of nature is just as much meaningless chaos to an intelligent believer as it is to an intelligent unbeliever. This is one thing that differentiates a miracle from a mere prodigy. The event to be a miracle has to be capable of being read as having a certain meaning, e.g. an expression of the divine compassion for God's people, an answer to prayer, a response to faith, an exemplification of the fact that everything works unto good for those who love God, or whom God loves, and so on.

The suggestion is that Hume is giving himself something of an unfair advantage in treating of miracles as isolated events in violation of laws of nature. The alleged miracle may be a 'violation' of one very general pattern of experience, but it is just as important to the believer if not more so that it

¹⁵ Ibid., p.69.
¹⁶ Cf. Gower, op. cit., p.28, last sentence of middle paragraph.
be an exemplification of another pattern or patterns of experience. The believer in miracles is helped a little bit more by what happens when we put these preliminary observations into contact with Hume's analysis of the idea of cause. The theologians from whom David Hume obtained the definition of miracle as a violation of the laws of nature were presumably, like the rest of humanity, working with a mistaken belief about what was involved in causality and consequently also in laws of nature. Like the rest of humanity, they thought that causality involved necessary connections out there in nature, secret links, circumstances in the cause connecting it with the effect. Now Hume has shown, according to his argument, that causal connection is constant conjunction of like objects and that the only necessary connection is in our minds, not in the objects, in the determination of the mind to go from one object to the other and to expect one when we experience the other. From the point of view of the pre-Humean believer, Hume has changed the definition of cause and consequently of 'laws of nature'. This being so, it becomes open to the would-be believer to change their definition of a 'miracle'.

One way of doing this might be to regard miracles as a sub-set of answers to prayer in faith. This would fit most of the miracles in the gospels; consider for instance the constant refrain of, "go your way, your faith has saved you". To toy with the idea for a moment (I will argue later that this is going too far), miracles could perhaps be regarded, not as violations of causal principles but as exemplifications of another causal principle in Hume's sense of cause, viz, a constant conjunction of like objects, in this case of prayer in faith and its answer, and a determination of the mind to expect one on the appearance of the other. The would-be believer would not be committed to anything he or she did not believe or explicitly profess before: "Ask and you shall receive, seek and you shall find...He who asks always receives, he who seeks always finds..." It is just that the believer considered before that 'causal connection' involved a secret link between the objects themselves, as well as their constant conjunction, and the believer thought that the secret link did not go directly between the prayer in faith and the marvel, but indirectly, from the prayer in faith to God and from God in his mercy to the marvel. (They may also have thought there was a difference between personal transactions no matter how reliable and transactions in the natural world, which of course Hume also does not allow: cf. EHU Section VIII, "Of Liberty and Necessity". We will come back to this.) The advantage of making miracles into exemplification of other causal principles rather than violations of causal principles is that while alleged
events may violate causal principles, causal principles themselves may peacefully co-exist. Magnetism does not violate gravity. Different principles are frequently interfering with each other. That is why we have to resort to probability, in spite of the fact that causes are always perfectly regular in their operation (cf. EHU 58). Nor is it necessary that causal principles be explicable by other causal principles in order to stand as such, though that be often the case. (Humean examples of this include the principles of association of ideas and the cause of errors in the Treatise, 'humanity' in the second Enquiry. Cf. T 13, 60; EPM 219-220, footnote.) Instead of an isolated alleged event standing against the whole of the rest of our experience, we have to do with a possible exemplification of alleged patterns of experience standing in the midst of other patterns.

Once doubt as to the fulfilment of initial conditions is taken into account, the believer becomes involved with considering probabilities: was the apparent prayer in faith really a prayer in faith? was what was prayed for really good for the person prayed for? "Ask, and it will be given you; search and you will find..." (Lk 11,9; Mt 7, 7) but this only applies, quite reasonably, to "good things" (Mt 7, 11), asked for in faith. (Cf. also James, 4, 3: "when you pray and don't get it, it is because you have not prayed properly, you have prayed for something to indulge your own desires.")

Of course, this is all to go much too far. The contemporary believer in miracles probably would not want to claim anything like a causal connection even in the reduced, Humean sense. Miracles if and when they happen, are personal transactions, with the miracle as an unmerited and mostly uncovenanted gracious gift, to be responded to with thankful praise. The logic of principles and laws is out of place. In addition, possibly as a consequence of this, even when conditions are fulfilled, the expectation while probably not so indefinite as to be completely unfalsifiable is probably much too indefinite to count as anything like a principle. As with Basil Mitchell's resistance fighter, the trust in the person has the primacy over any particular expectation, making for a belief which though falsifiable by too much failure of expectations is not easily or conclusively so. The believer would still claim patterns of this kind in his or her experience and the experience of their religious group as capable of confirming his or her faith, with the occasional possible miracle as candidates for the

exemplification of such patterns. And provided there is some degree of falsifiability allowed to claims for such patterns, this would probably be enough to make the logic of supporting such a claim more analogous to that of supporting possible exemplifications of a certain principle than that of supporting isolated exceptions to principles, enough anyway to throw the legitimacy of the application of the methodological rule into doubt.

The would-be post-Humean believer is far from home yet. He or she may have managed to bring the existence of the events they claim as miracles back within the scope of rational belief, but they still need something like the old secret links to and from God, something to recoup the vertical dimension so to speak, though now with the events as instances of something more like a constant conjunction, a particular kind of order, making for a certain pattern in our experience, rather than as isolated individual violations of such. And of course they also need a God to whom they can personally relate. A study of Hume's posthumously published Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, suggests that a further move may be possible in this matter, a move into a revised metaphysics. Such a move while enabling something like intelligent talk of God and secret links and such, would also have the effect of strengthening our confidence in our religious experience. This would be one consequence of providing a system of thinking and talking in which both the patterns of 'scientific' experience and patterns of 'religious' experience would be at home. Such a metaphysics, however, involves definite compromises for the believer, including the giving up of all traces of dogmatism. Talk of secret links and ultimate springs and principles, God and such, is to be treated as beyond the reach of human understanding, in a region where truth, in the sense of positions which all reasonable people would have to accept on the pain of not being reasonable, is no longer to be had. Provided all trace of dogmatism is dispelled, we may still indulge in such talk, it seems, for the sake of an agreeable amusement or because we find we cannot help it — like Hume in his Dialogues. In spite of our best efforts, what we come up with will be determined as much by habit, caprice, inclination, in short the effect our particular past history has had on us as by argument. But reasonable people may be allowed to differ, where no one can reasonably be positive18

18 The case for such an interpretation of the Dialogues has been developed in G. Moses, "Hume's Playful Metaphysics", Hume Studies, XVIII, April 1992, pp.63-80.
I am not saying that any believers would actually go along this path, nor that they would be ultimately successful if they did, just that it is a logical possibility in the Humean world of discourse. The believer might do well to read carefully the second Part of Section X of the Enquiry as a way of weaning himself or herself from traces of credulity, for the sake of good religion if for no other reason. And there are plenty of moves left for the unbeliever, in spite of the fact that he can no longer do the bulk of his work merely by a deduction from the inner logic of empirical methodology conjoined to a definition of miracles. The unbeliever could (1) contest the existence of a probabilistic co-relation between prayer in faith and good things prayed for, or of similar co-relations, or of anything even remotely analogous to such, thereby trying to reduce it to no more than would be expected from mere chance; (2) he could try to subsume any remnant of such co-relation under other principles, for example a co-relation between the difference confidence in the achievement of a goal makes to the person trying to achieve it and that person's achieving that goal, or the psychological and even physical influence of faith itself on the person who has it. The believers for their part might well admit that some of what they experience as a co-relation is explicable in this way and that this is part of God's good design, but that not all is so explicable. (3) The unbeliever could opt for and argue for a different metaphysics of the situation, for example a Philo-like metaphysics according to which there is no God apart from NATURE with its principle of order inherent in it and the necessary connections are really out there in nature itself, so that if we could see into the essence of matter it would all be as necessary as two and two are four. On the other hand, habit,

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19 Some of the arguments here also have been affected by the passage of time, especially Hume's fourth reason (EHU 121ff.), about the mutual destructiveness of testimonies for miracles in the different systems of religion. This is premised on the "we're right, you're wrong" theology (atheology) of religions. For reasons having little to do with the debate on miracles, the mainline churches have in the last century or so become a lot more tolerant of the existence of authentic salvific revelation outside their own particular systems and outside Christianity itself. In the context of these new theologies of religion, e.g. those of John Hick or Hans Kung, and even the position in the documents of Vatican II, the reports of miracles in the various religions may even be mutually supporting rather than mutually destructive of the existence and the compassion of the Transcendent named in different ways in the different systems.
caprice and inclination, etc. apply as much to unbelievers as they do to believers.

What the above discussion has aimed to show is that even the discussion of miracles is subject to what I have been calling 'the flow of history', in spite of Part I of Section X of Hume's first Enquiry and in spite of the claims of some of its modern defenders.

Appended Note
Fred Wilson, in "The Logic of Probabilities in Hume's Argument against Miracles", Hume Studies, XV, No.2, November 1989, argues that Hume thought miracles to be "absolutely impossible" (pp. 255, 259), since a miracle is against his (empirically established) principle that every event has a cause, which is to say that for every event there is a rule which explains it. Section X of Hume's first Enquiry is notable for not making use of this alleged belief, and confining itself to showing that we can never have reason to believe a miracle to have occurred, "that a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion." (EHU 127) Indeed he says, immediately after this, "For I own, that otherwise, there may possibly be miracles, or violations of the usual course of nature, of such a kind as to admit of proof from human testimony . . ."! (EHU 127) In spite of EHU 82 (cited in Wilson, footnote 35, to p.259), which occurs earlier in the Enquiry and in the context of an argument which has the form of an argumentum ad hominem, it would be strange for him to say this if he did believe they were "absolutely impossible". A suggestion for a reconciliation: the philosophical principle of causality is no more certain than a law of nature. Anything capable of overbalancing a law of nature would be enough to overbalance this also, so it makes no difference. In general, the philosophical principle of causality while accepted by Hume on an empirical basis is not all that important in the architectonic of Hume's thought, not nearly so important as, for example, the Principle of Sufficient Reason in Leibniz. It is so unimportant that Hume, having called it into question early in the Treatise (T 78ff.), bothers to establish it later only in passing (possibly T 132, cf. EHU 86-87 — how philosophers become convinced of the non-existence of contingent causes), in so far as he bothers at all. I believe, in any case, that the above gets the sense of Section X Part I in a way more appropriate to the text than Wilson's account. Wilson seeks to defend Hume against accusations of inconsistency made by C. D. Broad and others; as it happens I agree with Wilson most of the time, but he takes no account of such 'out of the way' responses as the above, which I think are open to the believer.