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Miracles Tradition and a Critique on Hume's Theory

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Abstract

Since appearing miracles and distancing them, denying or doubting Prophets' miracles and miracles tradition has had an old precedent. Although it may be imagined these oppositions have been proposed by the western philosophers and learned, but investigating the ancient sources and the past Islamic philosophers and learned we can find out that opposing these traditions has happened continuously since appearing miracles namely since the Prophets (PBUH). In modern era also some western learned, including David Hume, have embarked upon showing the miracles tradition and consequently the very miracles to be blemished and undocumented. Opposing Hume and answering his objections began during his own life and has been continued up to today. In this article Hume's opinion will be studied and considering the experts' opinions in Islamic and Western world his objections will be answered.

Keywords: Miracle tradition, Miracles, Historical traditions, Reasons, Encroachment, Empiricism, Hume.

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Introduction

Without a doubt, one of the tools from which the Prophets and Imams used for proving their claim or the legitimacy or truth of their word as well as for proving their scientific authority was the miracle and proofs. Apart from the different kinds of these miracles and without regarding some differences that may exist among proofs and miracles and without any lexical discussion about the language use of these interpretations, in this article we consider the miracle traditions, the truth and falsehood of reference to them, without proving or refuting them, and without any analysis of miracle tradition and probably their purification. Therefore, we try to prove that the reference to miracle tradition is rational, natural and justifiable. Hence, as we mention later, any doubting in reference to miracle tradition and analyzing them from a completely material, modern and empirical viewpoint is unreasonable and in some cases in conflict with the most evident things and a looking over the most original signs of life, even of the disbelievers' identity. It may be imagined these oppositions have been proposed by the western philosophers, but by investigating the ancient sources and Islamic philosophers' theories we can find out that opposing these traditions has occurred since happening the miracles, namely since Prophets and have been continued in next periods. In recent times, some Western scholars such as David Hume tried to make miracles seem flawed and unreliable. To reject his theory, in addition to proofs such as memories and the past well-preserved, witness of eyewitness and historical reports and quotations, left physical traces and some scientific laws, the most important proofs that have been adduced to prove the miracle traditions is the successive transmission of miracles traditions and reference to them and their acceptance that has been studied in detail in this paper.

A panorama of opposition to miracle tradition

Opposition to the miracle is an issue that must be addressed from two independent perspectives. First, the very miracles are denied and some people are trying to prove them; second, the traditions and reports based on which miracles can be proved are doubted and denied. The first part has been done on all the holy prophets. At the time of every Prophet, or after them there are disbelievers who have not accepted the miracles or have considered them as witchcraft and the like and it is natural that Prophets and their followers try to prove the legitimacy of them. Some examples of this have been mentioned in the Qur'an as well. Perhaps the most important parts of this section can be known about denying the eternal miracle of the Prophet, the Qur'an and denying the descent of revelation on Prophet (PBUH); a few verses have been revealed to prove its truth and the disbelievers have been called to challenge.

Accordingly, the opposition to miracle and its authority and rejecting the argument and reference to the miracle has a long history. Perhaps the first oppositions to miracle and reference to it have coincided with the argument to miracle to prove the prophets' prophecy. Taking position of some opponents of the earlier prophets against miracles and doubting on their prophecy by rejecting these miracles, some of which have been mentioned in the Quran, proves the claim that using miracles by the prophets and opposing some people to it has raised serious challenges and involved all the prophets.

But it seems that opponents of miracle traditions, especially in the modern era, try through opposing the miracle traditions to stand against the authority of historical narrations and under the pretext of "lack of experience of historical reports" do not accept everything that can be not experienced despite being known.

Beginning of opposing to miracles

The main oppositions to the miracles have been started since the Prophets and in some cases have been continued. Denying the descent of revelation on Prophet (PBUH) and the opposition to the miracle of the Quran has begun in the time of that Highness and although in the verses of the Quran it was met with a firm response it has continued. Denial of the miracles of the prophets and consequently denying the miracle of the Quran that leads to to deny the prophecy of venerable Prophet (PBUH) created gradually a particular attitude in hagiography and some people sought to explain the Prophet's life with a different view based on the miracles of venerable Prophet (PBUH) and extraordinary events. This type of writing that is known as the "proofs-book" and hagiography on the basis of proofs and miracles expanded quickly and due to its importance, became so widespread that between 320 and 460 AH about 40 independent books on "proofs for Prophecy" and "signs of Prophecy" were written. The main objective of these works is to prove the prophecy of the prophets, especially prophecy of venerable Prophet ((PBUH) through proving and arguing his miracles and extraordinary events (See: Khanjani, 2006, the proofs-book in Life of the Prophet).

First opponents of miracle tradition

One of the scientists dissenting miracle traditions is Muhammad ibn Zakariya Razi (born on 313 H.); in addition to expertise in various fields of natural science and medicine he was of specific opinions in religious teachings. Some of his theories about the knowledge of God and the prophecy and especially revelation and miracles of the prophets caused that his contemporary scientist and compatriot, Abu Hatim al-Razi (born on 322 H.) writes an independent book in response to Zakaria Razi's theories. Abu Hatim in his book has criticized

strongly to Zakaria Razi to the extent that throughout his book he has called Zakaria Razi as "heretic" and elsewhere in his book he cursed this unbeliever (for example, see Abu Hatim al-Razi, 2002, pp. 228 and 229).

In response to Zechariah who has thought that those who have quoted miracles of the Prophet (PBUH) are two or three people, so there is the possibility of collusion, Abu Hatam says: The suspect of this atheist (Zechariah) is not true, because most of these miracles have been seen most of the Muslims and the disbelievers and there is no possibility of collusion among them; however, the proof of these miracles is obvious and those who have seen them are just and nobody has denied them (Abu Hatim al-Razi, 2012, pp. 191 and 192).

Except Razi, others also have sought to deny or doubt the miracles. So, Sharif Mortaza (1431, p. 344) in a subject related to traditions has responded to their objection.

So, David Hume is not the first who has opposed to miracles. Therefore, before answering Hume it is necessary to explain appropriately his objection and then be answered.

Hume's objection

In his essay "About miracles" in the book "Research on human understanding" Hume wants to introduce the acceptance of miracle traditions to be unreasonable by using some arguments of the calculus of probabilities and by this means resorting to miracle for the defense of Christianity makes inefficient. To achieve this goal, he does not check any special tradition about happening miracles, but he claims he can offer an overall argument that can make us capable of doing without the case studies. He thinks he has an argument against miracles so that it invalidates all miracles traditions, even if they are quoted by the most reliable witnesses and transmitted us by the most trustworthy narrators. He considers this argument is highly innovative, strong and tough, but his critics think otherwise.

Some have questioned its being innovative and have quoted examples of these arguments from Hume's predecessors and others deny the certainty and coherence of the and regard confusing the entire article on miracles. Such critiques of Hume were started simultaneously with writing this article and also his contemporary thinkers have criticized him. George Campbell is a contemporary of Hume. He doubted the originality of Hume's argument but did not speak about it. He regards Hume's discussions in rejecting the miracle traditions without value and considers his discussion merely as a trick to arouse readers' surprise and gain their trust (Fath Ali Khani, 2011, p. 221).

Hume's arguments on untrustworthiness of testimonies

David Hume in the second part of the article "About miracles" that is Part I of "an inquiry on human understanding", brought five reasons to show that historical evidences of happening miracles cannot be a certain reason for happening miracle. Therefore, there is no proved miracle based on which can prove rationally certain religious principles. The reasons are as follows:

1. There is no miracle that enough qualified people have affirmed it, also no miracle has happened in the famous part of the world so that admitting it be unavoidable.
2. Human has a strong tendency in his nature to the bizarre; many examples of fake miracles and prophecies and supernatural events that have been discovered or are discovered by contradictory testimonies show sufficiently the strong tendency of human being to the extraordinary things. Especially if the spirit of religion is combined with this interest and desire common sense ends, because it causes, for example, a religious person to see by religious enthusiasm what is not real.
3. In fact, the supernatural and miraculous traditions are observed mostly among ignorant and wild nations in abundance. This reality creates serious and strong doubts against them, because it strengthens the likelihood that the traditions about the miracle result from the period of human ignorance of proper methods of scientific and philosophical explanation, so that in such an environment, people have always the common desire to the bizarre and for events search the abnormal and invisible factors.
4. Because of the conflict of different religions, the miracles that have been claimed to prove the legitimacy of each of them weaken and override each other.
5. The fact that the miraculous story is used as approval for any new religion is an additional argument for skepticism; a number of people have serious interest to believe some of the religious themes and experience has shown that a lot of people are fooled by such claims (Hume, 2007, p 102-107).

A number of responses were proposed by the contemporary thinkers of Hume; here we mention some of them:

1. Henry Thiessen, Christian theologian, tries to defend the logical implication of the existence of miracle for proving the existence of God, but what he has stated can be a clear response to Hume and his colleagues. He writes: "This claim the people who have not seen miracles doubt always on it, is based on the false assumption that one should put all his beliefs based on human experience." then in violating the claim he says, "We have not seen on the ground the severe frost, but from geologists we have accepted it" (Thiessen, 1381, p. 11).

Apparently, on the basis of this argument, Allameh Tabatabaei considers difficult the acceptance of extraordinary things even for natural scientists, because they explain the phenomena with modern knowledge and experience but miracle is beyond their experience (Tabatabai, 1983, pp. 25-30).

2. John Hick also for proving God's existence through the special events and experiences believes that some special events, such as miracles and answering one's prayers, of the kind that many people witnessed it proves the existence of God (Hick, 2002, p. 70). Hick, of course, has not come in response to Hume, but confessed implicitly the truth of any miracles for God's existence.

3. Richard Swinburne might be one who partially responses to Hume's objections and has criticized in detail "Hume's" argument and "Antony Flew". Unlike Hume and Flew, he considers possible proving the historical miracles with the help of evidences. He has tried to demonstrate there are four types of evidences for investigating something that happened in the past: a. Through memory; b. Through the testimony of eyewitnesses and historical quotes; c. Through physical traces left by the kind of research in criminology; d. Scientific laws.

In his view, Hume and Flew from between four kinds of reason, have considered only the second and fourth and they have criticized and rejected the second based on the fourth, but the two others have been not mentioned. (See: Ahmadi, 1999, pp. 173-175).

After explaining some principles Swinburne asserted that firstly, contrary to Hume and Antony Flew, the historical propositions like nomological (regular) ones are verifiable according to a scientific method and in this respect, the fourth type reason (ie nomological propositions that are considered as scientific laws) not preferred over miracle propositions (historical events). Secondly, by virtue of the above-mentioned fourth principle, a researcher can prefer the reasons of the first three types that indicate the occurrence of a historic event, due to the abundance of evidence and reasons and their consistency over reasons of fourth type (nomological propositions) (Ahmadi, 1999, pp. 174-184).

4. In Hume's first objection we read: "there is no miracle that the sufficient and qualified people have asserted it". It seems that Hume indicates the successive transmission of miracle traditions, although he does not explicit it. Therefore, the first question is what is meant for him the sufficient and qualified people or the same successive transmission? In other words, he has not determined exactly what successive transmission is and in what condition we can consider a narration with certainty as a successive tradition. The successive transmission has been defined so: traditions of people to the extent that it is absurd normally to be agreed on its falsehood and that which creates certainty (Mamaqani, 1411, vol. 1, p. 89-90). Moreover,

Hume's objection is not true on Quran, because Quran's miracle is not only referred to the tradition of predecessors, but Quran is an eternal miracle and calls to encroachment.

Even the sufficiency of miracle reporters or the same taking shape of successive transmission is the most important reason of miracles. Although it seems that successive transmission has been ignored intentionally by Hume. Hume, based on deterministic empiricism wants to say the miracle tradition is not have, while in discussing miracles we do not deal with deterministic empiricism. In philosophy of miracle, it has been considered this fact that the miracle is not contemporary event because the miracle is accompanied with encroachment; the Prophet brings miracle for proving his prophecy.

However, the miracle tradition can be proved by the very successive transmission. For example, discussing some reasons of the Prophet's miracle Abu Hatam Razi says:

"All people agree upon these miracles and believers and disbelievers have seen them and successors have received them from the predecessors" (Abu Hatam Razi, 2002, p. 191).

He has added that the word of the atheist (Zakaria Razi) who has thought Prophet's miracles have been quoted by one, two or three people, and it can happen a collusion, is not a proof, because these have been seen by many believers and disbelievers.

After quoting some miracles of Prophet he says:

"These miracles are cited in prophets' books that believers read them and do not deny them; these are not things on which can be happened collusion; they are traditions from the miracles that have happened in different times before the Prophet (Abu Hatam Razi, 2002, p. 198).

As about the Prophet's Mission in Old Testament, revelation and transmitting it, we read:

"Prophet like you from among their brethren, though I will put in his mouth my words and everything that I command, he will tell them" (Testament, 2014, p. 654).

In addition to Abu Hatim Razi, Haroni Hasani Zaydi has emphasized with similar terms on the successive transmission of these reports. He says:

"And that enjoys celebrity news and quotes from other historical tradition and its companions do not doubt their reputation because many people are aware of them (Haroni Hasani, 1424, vol. 1, p. 258).

In addition to Muslim scholars, some Western philosophers refer to successive transmission and said:

"Although there are many differences on which event is miraculous and which is not miraculous, but despite this, all agree that throughout history, many miracles happened at

different times. So, how you can explain the cause of a miracle in some way other than to say that God has intervened in the natural course of events and has caused the miracles? Thus, the occurrence of miracles proves that God exists "(Hospers, 83).

Another argument against miracles in the second part of Hume, which is impressive. He says:

"I can credit as a reason for the decline of these amazing add that the interests of any one of these things have not brought testimony that a large number of witnesses have not opposed it. To better understand the content better acceptance of religions, different meaning and May not conflict religions of ancient Rome, Turkey, Siam and China have all proven to be a sound basis. Thus, any alleged miracle occurred in one of these religions (and all of these religions are full of miracles), as its direct target specific theological system is a proven miracle that this miracle that is attributed, can also indirectly religious systems overthrows another. And because other religious system is flawed, the miracles the foundation of which is the system is flawed. The amazing events of different religions have conflicting events, and the reasons for these amazing events, whether weak or strong, should be considered Opposites "(Fathalikhani, 2011, p. 273).

In response to this argument have said that if such miracles be proven for a religion requires of all other religions are false; firstly, because some religions are pluralistic view. Eastern religions (India and China) have such secondly Abraham's monotheistic religions also believe in the exclusivity of its legitimacy, right before your religions accept the existence of miracles.

In addition, responding Hume we must say that no testimony has been asserted on the wonderful things that has been not opposed by testimony of many witnesses.

First, from where you have earned these oppositions? Where are these objections of which only you are aware of it? Unless you've checked all the wonderful things that you came to this conclusion?

Second, why should we accept this result by you? Do not you think the testimony and credibility of narrations people give, even if their number is great, is not valid? Do not make your argument weak your claim? That you expect the witness of a lot of people, because of the possibility of error, is not acceptable but your conclusion alone be acceptable.

Moreover, you who say, "It is better to accept in order to better understand the content, the difference in religions is in the sense of conflict", based on which dictionary you have meant difference as the conflict? This means that perhaps a miracle of Moses (AS), according to Jews claim, the miracles of Prophet Jesus, according to what Christians claim and miracles of

Prophet (PBUH), according to what Muslims claim, are conflict-based; however, it is not the case.

So if only based on empiricism we face with phenomena such as miracles and other traditions, we will have inevitably to overlook the historical narrations and all the propositions proven in human life. Because many of them cannot be experienced and are related to past narrations in Hume's view and could not be trusted. As Earman says: it is interesting that Hume in approving his view has appealed to an example that helps to understand the insufficiency of inductive arguments monopoly, and accept for narrations of the past a validity.

Example of the Indian Prince is known example Hume has borrowed from his predecessors. We use the same example in the opposite orientation Hume has adopted it to be clear that the risks of the inductive argument monopoly what risks have. He says:

"A person from the people of India that his country never has left and no white man or woman has seen and has seen only black people; he thinks that being white is opposite to human nature. And because he has found the nature such as that, even if all speak to the contrary to his opinion he says they lie.

Now, who's in error, one who accepts his reason on the human nature or the person who does not accept but accepts there are whites? (Earman, 2000, p33; quoted by Fathalikhani, 2011, p. 230)

The cause of the Indian's incorrect decision is nothing other than that he thinks like Hume and therefore he gives so credence to his past observations that he thinks absurd the phenomenon that is possible in itself and as a result, he disagrees with the occurrence of narrations they acknowledge.

John Lock also has brought a similar example, with a different application. In chapter 15 of the fourth book of "an essay concerning human understating", he has discussed on the levels of human knowledge; discussing the probable knowledge he has introduced two origins of that type of knowledge. One of them is the narration of those who speak of their observations with others. For Lock if the member of witnesses and narrators, their truthfulness, and recording power are sufficient and their narration has coherence and a conflicting witness does not refute their narration, and if there is not an intriguing narrator, we must accept that narration and trust it. He continues:

"If I see someone walk on ice, my acceptance of this event is higher than probable. If someone narrates me that in winter and in England someone walked on the frozen water, since his narration is consistent with the past experience [I live in England], in case that his narration is not accompanied with a doubtful reading, so I am ready to accept his narration.

But if someone living in the equator regions is informed by this narration, since he has never seen this event, the amount of his confidence to this narration is dependent on a number of witnesses and narrators and their validity; of course, one whose past experiences are in contrast with this event, he accepts rarely the narration of even most authentic individuals."

Like the story of Netherland ambassador who occupied the Syam's king with his stories. He told him that in Netherland's winter the water is so frozen that we can walk on it and even it can bear an elephant. The king told: up now since I found you an authentic and fair man, I believed in the wonderful things that you narrated, but now I am sure that you lie (Fathalikhani, 2011, p. 230; see also Lock, 1998, p. 386-387).

In Lock's opinion, the reasonable method in such cases is to investigate the authenticity and validity of narration, not refuting that on basis of its opposition with the listener's past experiences. In this story Lock does not say we must confirm the performance of Syam king, but he wants to show the psychological effect of the past observations on the listener of narration (Fathalikhani, 2011, p. 231).

While Hume says: "the Indian prince who avoided to accept the first narration of the frost effect, had right in his argument; a certain testimony was necessary for accepting the events that result from a natural state, a thing with which he was unfamiliar and the similarity with the events of which he had a constant and uniform experience, was very little. Those narrations were not in conflict with experience but did not correspond also" (Hume, 1989, p. 113, quoted by Fahalikhani, 2012, p. 231-232).

There are two considerable points in these sentences. First, Hume considers natural the behavior of Indian prince; second, he says these narrations are not in conflict with his experiences, but they do not correspond, too.

Hume has tried to accept the incorrectness of Indian prince's action through distinguishing between the extraordinary and miracles, without considering incorrect the denial of the wonderful events (Hume, 1989, p. 114, quoted by Fathalikhani, 2011, p. 232).

Therefore, if non-confidence to miracle traditions is spread to the historical narrations and to normal ones, no other narration can be proved, whether the narration of miracles of Prophets or the past normal narrations such as birth, death etc. In this case, the individual's identity will be faced with serious doubts.

Accordingly, if Mr. Hume is asked which are your parents? He may introduce a man and a woman as those whom he knows as his parents. If we do not trust the tradition of predecessors, how Mr. Hume can prove his identity and his relation with parents? This is

because, firstly, Mr. Hume does not remember the birth time and recognizing his parents, secondly, we have not to accept the tradition of Mr. Hume and others introducing the mentioned Mr. and Mrs. as his real parents because we did not exist that time and we didn't experience his birth. Even the DNA test is also in this regard useless, because it may be happened a collusion in the process of the experiment, too.

Conclusion

From total topics of this article, it is obtained that based on empiricism Hume has known unacceptable the argument to the miracles tradition. Lack of sufficient evidences on happening miracles, miracles conflict in different religions, the occurrence of miracles among the ignorant and wild people and very strong tendency of human being to the bizarre are among Hume's main reasons for proving the falsehood of miracles. But these reasons were met with some oppositions in Hume's time and some rejected explicitly these arguments. Among Western scholars, Henry Thiessen, John Hick, and Hospers responded to Hume citing reasons such as, memory, testimony of eyewitnesses and Historical quotes, physical traces remaining of the type of researches that are common in criminology, scientific laws and successive transmission of traditions. Islamic scientists and philosophers in addition to the mentioned reasons, with emphasis on the successive transmission of traditions, falsehood of some claims of Hume, the confusion between the method of philosophy and empirical science, explaining the phenomena by modern science and experience and the contradictions in Hume's argument have considered among his most important objections.

Therefore, although it is possible that in some cases, such as the restriction in transferring facts or psychological reasons or personal errors the miracles traditions have been more obese than reality or manipulated, but it is not accepted these traditions are measured by the experience criterion and as a result are doubted and become totally useless. Especially if this improper look is transmitted naturally also to other historical traditions, it cannot be proved any historical tradition and with this look the most important effect that is taking model and learning a lesson will be useless.

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