

Chapter Two

The Historian and Miracles

[T]he historian (even one who is a believer) finds herself simply unable to deal with some of the central assertions of the Christian faith, the most striking example of this being the resurrection of Jesus.¹

Gregory Dawes

As long as historiography does not begin dogmatically with a narrow concept of reality according to which ‘dead men do not rise,’ it is not clear why historiography should not in principle be able to speak about Jesus’ resurrection as the explanation that is best established of such events as the disciples’ experiences of the appearances and the discovery of the empty tomb.²

Wolfhart Pannenberg

2.1. Introductory Comments

A number of years ago, my wife was stopped at a traffic light when a truck hit her car from behind. She sustained permanent injury to her back as a result. The truck driver’s insurance company was stubborn and did not want to pay most of the expenses we incurred. So, the matter went to court. I was one of the first witnesses called and at one point stated that the insurance company did not even want to provide a rental car while our car was being repaired. The moment I said that, the defense attorney made a motion. The judge then dismissed me. Then he dismissed the jury. A few minutes later I learned that the judge had declared a mistrial. I had not been informed by my attorney that “insurance company” was a forbidden term in a trial such as ours.

Something similar often occurs in the field of historical Jesus research. There is a lot of discussion over what the real Jesus actually said and did. But when anyone mentions the terms “miracle” or “resurrection” it is not uncommon for some scholars to jump to their feet and shout, “Objection! You can’t go there as a historian.” Although I am not an attorney, I would be willing to bet that there are some good reasons for barring the mention of the insurance company involved. After all, insurance companies are big, impersonal corporations with deep pockets. Reminding jurors of this might bias them toward finding for the plaintiff. There are likewise reasons provided for why historians are forbidden from investigating miracle claims. This is important, since if historians are barred from investigating miracle claims, we

¹ Dawes (1998), 32. So also Eastham (2000): “There is no historical evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Resurrection is the limit case of historical method, plainly not the sort of topic to preoccupy the Jesus Seminar” (176).

² Pannenberg (1974), 109; cf. Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 71. So also Braaten (1999): “The resurrection is to be considered an historical event because it is the subject of reports that locate it in time and space. It happened in Jerusalem a short time after Jesus was crucified” (155).

can go no further in our inquiry pertaining to the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus. As historians we have reached a dead end.

I am convinced the reasons typically provided are mistaken. If a past event left traces, most historians hold that it can be the subject of historical investigation. What about when the event in question is a miracle? By miracle, I am referring to *an event in history for which natural explanations are inadequate*. That is not to say that there still could be a natural explanation which has yet to be discovered. It is to say that the nature of the event itself is such that there could be no natural cause.³ Some

³ The term *miracle* is an essentially contested concept and numerous definitions have been offered: Bartholomew (2000): “a miracle is an act by some power external to the natural world. If, therefore, something happens which cannot be explained by the natural processes of the world and which cannot be attributed to human agency then there is a prima facie case for supposing that a miracle has occurred” (81); Beaudoin (2006): “*events in the natural world that would not occur but for the interposing of a supernatural force*” (116, emphasis in original); Bultmann (1958): “miracles are events which in themselves have no religious character, but which are attributed to divine (or dæmonic) causation” (173); Davis (1993): “a miracle is an event E that (1) is brought about by God and (2) is contrary to the prediction of a law of nature that we have compelling reason to believe is true. That is, the law predicts that, given the circumstances preceding E, some event other than E will occur; E occurs because God causes E to occur; and no other law of nature or set of laws of nature could have helped us to have predicted, given the circumstances, that E would have occurred” (Davis [1993], 10-11); Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008): “events that contradict the normal workings of nature in such a way as to be virtually beyond belief and to require an acknowledgment that supernatural forces have been at work” (241); cf. Ehrman’s comments in Craig and Ehrman (2006) where he states that miracle “is by definition, the most implausible explanation” (13); Geisler (1999): “A *miracle* is a special act of God that interrupts the natural course of events” (450); Hume (*d. 1776*): “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature” and “a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent,” in David Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*, Vol II, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X, “Of Miracles” (originally published 1777), 114, 115. An online text is located at <http://etext.leeds.ac.uk/hume/ehu/ehupbsb.htm> (Leeds Electronic Text Centre, University of Leeds, 2000); C. S. Lewis (1978): “an interference with Nature by supernatural power” (5); Mackie (1982): “a supernatural intrusion into the normally closed system that works in accordance with [the laws of nature]” (22); Meier (1994): “A miracle is (1) an unusual, startling, or extraordinary event that is in principle perceivable by any interested and fair-minded observer, (2) an event that finds no reasonable explanation in human abilities or in other known forces that operate in our world of time and space, and (3) an event that is the result of a special act of god, doing what no human power can do” (Vol. 2, 512). Interestingly, Meier does not regard the resurrection of Jesus as a miracle, since it does not meet his first criteria of a miracle (525); here Meier seems to confuse the *definition* of a miracle with the *identification* of a miracle. Moreland and Craig (2003) distinguish between *providentia ordinaria* and *providential extraordinaria*, or acts of God that are ordinary and extraordinary. Classifying miracle as *providential extraordinaria*, they define miracles as “naturally (or physically) impossible events, events which at certain times and places cannot be produced by the relevant natural causes” (567-68). Purtill (“Defining Miracles” in Habermas and Geivett [1997]): “an event in which God temporarily makes an exception to the natural order of things, to show that God is acting” (62-63); Swinburne (1989): “an event of an extraordinary kind brought about by a god and of religious significance” (2); Theissen and Merz (1998): “A miracle is an event which goes against normal expectations and has a religious significance: it is understood as the action of a god” (309); Tucker (2005): “divine feats of strength” (378); Twelftree (1999) provides a list of eight general definitions of miracle (25-27). The following I owe to the research of Colin Brown (1984), the page number is where the citation appears in C. Brown’s book: Kant (*d. 1804*): “they are events in the world the *operating laws* of whose causes are, and must remain, absolutely unknown to us. Accordingly, one can conceive of either *theistic* or *demonic* miracles” (106); Augustine (*d. 430*): “whatever appears that is difficult or unusual above the hope and power of them who wonder” (7); Hobbes (*d. 1679*): “A miracle is a work of God (besides His operation by the way of nature, ordained in the Creation) done for the making manifest to His elect the mission of an extraordinary minister for their salvation. . . . that no devil, angel, or created spirit can do a miracle” (35); Locke (*d. 1704*): “A miracle, then, I take to be a sensible operation, which, being above the comprehension of the spectator,

historians assign the study of miracle claims to theologians and philosophers, asserting that historians do not possess the tools for investigating the occurrence of a miraculous event. Thus, if a miracle truly occurred, the historian *as historian* can never conclude that it did.

In this chapter we will discuss objections to the historical consideration of miracle claims as advanced by these scholars: David Hume, C. Behan McCullagh, John P. Meier, Bart D. Ehrman, A. J. M. Wedderburn, and James D. G. Dunn. We will see how each objection fails and why the hesitancy standard for many historians before the investigation of a miracle claim is, after all, unnecessary.

2.2. David Hume

In his treatment *Of Miracles*, the Scottish skeptic David Hume argues that we are never justified in concluding that a miracle has occurred. In part one of his essay, he states that the uniform experience of the overwhelming majority of people is that they have never witnessed a miracle. This uniform experience amounts to a proof. Therefore,

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 endeavors 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.⁴

Hume explains his principle with an illustration of someone who informs him that he has seen a dead man restored to life. He asks what is more probable: that this person is deceived, is deceiving, or that the dead man actually rose from the dead? Hume weighs the data and decides on the option that is the lesser miracle. “If the falsehood of his testimony would be more miraculous, than the event which he relates,” then we are merited in holding that the event occurred.⁵

Hume goes on in part two to provide four reasons why no miracle claims have ever met or could ever meet this burden of proof. First, the witnesses are never good enough to warrant preferring their testimony over a naturalistic theory.

There is not to be found, in all history, any miracle attested by a sufficient number of men, of such unquestioned good sense, education, and learning, as to secure us against all delusion in themselves; of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion of any design to deceive others; of such credit and reputation in the eyes of mankind, as to have a great deal to lose in

and in his opinion contrary to the established course of nature, is taken by him to be divine” (43); Tillich (*d.* 1965): “A genuine miracle is first of all an event which is astonishing, unusual, shaking, without contradicting the rational structure of reality. In the second place, it is an event which points to the mystery of being, expressing its relation to us in a definite way. In the third place, it is an occurrence which is received as a sign-event in an ecstatic experience” (172); Warfield (*d.* 1921): “an effect in the external world, produced by the immediate efficiency of God” (199); D. and R. Basinger: “a religious concept (an act of God) which derives its uniqueness not from its explicability status, but from the fact that it is part of an unusual event sequence” (210).

⁴ Hume (1777), 116.

⁵ Hume (1777), 116.

case of their being detected in any falsehood; and at the same time, attesting facts performed in such a public manner and in so celebrated a part of the world, as to render the detection unavoidable. All which circumstances are requisite to give us a full assurance in the testimony of men.⁶

Hume's second reason draws from the principle of analogy and appeals to antecedent probability.

[W]e ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations. But though, in proceeding by this rule, we readily reject any fact which is unusual and incredible in an ordinary degree.⁷

Thus, two arguments are here put forth: First, if we have observed that animals do not talk in our lifetime, nor have spoken in the recent past, we should reject views maintaining they did in the past. Balaam's donkey⁸ and the animals of *Aesop's Fables* serve as examples. Second, if the historical record is nearly unanimous that the dead do not return to life, the few testimonies to the contrary should be rejected. Eminent Humean scholar Antony Flew adds that "the present relics of the past cannot be interpreted as historical evidence at all unless we presume that the same fundamental regularities obtained then as still obtain today."⁹

Hume's third reason goes back to the poor quality of the witnesses behind miracle reports: "[T]hey are observed chiefly to abound among ignorant and barbarous nations. . . . *It is strange . . . that such prodigious events never happen in our days.* But it is nothing strange, I hope, that men should lie in all ages."¹⁰ Hume's fourth reason is that testimonies of miracles in one religion are weighed against an infinite number of witnesses who testify of miracle claims in competing religions. Therefore, these cancel out each other. Thus, based on his four reasons, Hume concludes that "a miracle can never be proved, so as to be the foundation of a system of religion."¹¹

Although numerous replies to Hume have been offered,¹² his thesis remains influential, even after more than two hundred years. Dunn writes, "As David Hume had earlier pointed out, it is more probable that the account of a miracle is an untrue account than that the miracle recounted actually took place."¹³ Even most conservative Christian scholars would not object to the principle that if a competing hypothesis to Jesus' resurrection were of at least equal weight to the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead, then for the matter of historical adjudication, the natural theory should be preferred.¹⁴ Hume's thesis is valuable since it begs the historian to be extra cautious when considering the historicity of miracle claims. However, I will

⁶ Hume (1777), 116-17.

⁷ Hume (1777), 117. Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008) argues similarly (244).

⁸ Numbers 22:28-30.

⁹ A. Flew, "Non-Humean Arguments About the Miraculous" in Geivett and Habermas, eds. (1997), 49.

¹⁰ Hume (1777), 119-20, emphasis in original.

¹¹ Hume (1777), 127.

¹² In personal correspondence with Christian philosopher Gary Habermas, Antony Flew wrote that the book Habermas edited with Geivett, *In Defense of Miracles*, is now *the* book for skeptics to answer pertaining to addressing Hume's arguments. Also see Habermas and Licona (2004), chapter 8; Swinburne, "For the Possibility of Miracles" in Pojman (1998), 308-14; Twelftree (1999), 40-43.

¹³ Dunn (2003), 103-04.

¹⁴ Eddy and Boyd (2007), 52, 78.

highlight a few responses that weaken his contention that a miracle can never be established.

2.2.1. Hume's first point is that witnesses to miracles are never good enough to prefer their testimony over an alternative natural explanation. According to Hume, the testimony of any reliable event must have the following credentials in order to qualify as a historical event. It must be attested by a sufficient number of witnesses of "unquestioned good sense, education, and learning" and "of such undoubted integrity, as to place them beyond all suspicion" of deceit.¹⁵ Moreover, these witnesses are to be of such a high reputation in the eyes of others, that they would have much to lose if lying. Finally, he demands that the event be performed publicly in a major part of the world so that its visibility would be unavoidable. When all of these conditions are met, historians may have confidence that the testimony under consideration is true.¹⁶

If Hume's criteria for accepting testimony as true were employed outside of miracle claims, we would probably have to dismiss the vast majority of what we believe we presently know about the past. Much of what we hold about the past was reported by a lone source and is rarely "beyond all suspicion." While data meeting Hume's criteria are certainly desirable, historians do not hesitate to make historical judgments when they are unmet, since they have a number of tools with which they work, namely criteria for authenticity and arguments to the best explanation.¹⁷

Hume's argument concerning the intelligence and integrity of witnesses to miracles makes three claims: Testimonies of miracles abound among the ignorant and uneducated, they do not occur in modern times, and deceitful witnesses abound. On these claims Hume's argument again faces numerous challenges. It is true that citizens in third-world countries may be more gullible than the educated in modern cultures and may mistake for supernatural a spectacular event known by scientists to have a natural cause, such as an eclipse or the northern lights. It is likewise true that there are numerous miracle claims from the past and that deceitful witnesses abound. However, the converse is also true: miracles are both claimed and believed by highly educated persons in modern society and truthful witnesses abound.¹⁸ Certainly caution is in order. We must consider miracle claims on a case-by-case basis. If the evidence for a miracle is credible and no plausible natural explanations exist, to reject it on the basis that other miracle claims abound among the ignorant and uneducated is to be guilty of arguing *ad hominem*. Thus, historians need not bow to Hume's criteria for acceptable testimony.

¹⁵ Hume (1777), 116.

¹⁶ Hume (1777), 116-17.

¹⁷ Habermas (2003), 7-8. Habermas adds, "Strangely enough, Hume was well aware of this, as he did not apply these four criteria to his own multi-volumes *History of England*" (8).

¹⁸ Keener (2003) writes, "As a former atheist who has personally witnessed, occasionally experienced, and is regularly exposed to reliable testimonies of instantaneous supernatural phenomena within circles where such phenomena typically occur (including instantaneous, visible healings in response to prayer), often through my work in Africa or among Pentecostals, I confess my own skepticism toward the prevailing anti-miraculous skepticism of Western culture. My wife, an African with a Ph.D. in history from the University of Paris, also offers a substantial collection of testimonies. Interpreters might seek to suggest plausible alternative, non-supernatural explanations for the thousands of miracle claims in the Two-Thirds World today, but for the most part the academy simply ignores such claims as if no one has offered them." Keener goes on to note, however, that these must be regarded as anecdotal because of "the limited base of data from which we work and the unfortunate dearth of academic works cataloguing such claims" (1:267).

2.2.2. Hume's second point is similar to the principle of analogy presented nearly one and a half centuries later by Ernst Troeltsch and focuses on antecedent probability:¹⁹ Events of the past do not differ in kind from those in the present. Thus, if miracles do not occur today, they did not occur in the past.²⁰ One might argue that if the historian fails to employ this principle, there is nothing to prevent us from accepting fairy tales as historical.²¹ Dunn explains the application of analogy to the resurrection of Jesus:

When we add the initial observation—that departure from this life (death) can indeed be described as a historical event, whereas entry on to some further existence can hardly be so described—it can be seen just how problematic it is to speak of the resurrection of Jesus as historical. . . . [T]he historical method inevitably works with some application of the principle of analogy.²²

Pieter Craffert who takes a social scientific approach likewise comments:

The principle of analogy which is one of the basic principles of all social scientific study, is not restricted to the sceptical historian, but applies to all historiography as well as to everyday life. There is no other option but to apply to present practical standards of everyday life to determine whether the decision of the historian to reject the claims of some events narrated in ancient sources, is valid.²³

While analogy demands our attention and caution in a study of the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, there are drawbacks to its unqualified usage. Numerous established modern beliefs would fail using the principle of analogy. For example, we could not conclude that dinosaurs existed in the past. After all, historians and scientists do not experience them today. One may object that we can still establish dinosaurs scientifically, since their fossils remain. But the historian may reply that this is in spite of the principle of analogy and that we may likewise be able to establish miracles historically, because we have credible testimony that remains. Therefore, the principle of analogy can be taken too far as Dunn explains: “[T]he acids which the historical method uses to clean away the surface varnish and later reworkings of the original painting eat not only into such later accretions but into the original painting and the very canvas itself.”²⁴

¹⁹ Troeltsch (1913), 2:729-53.

²⁰ Also see Anchor (1999) who says that only our direct knowledge of reality in the present allows us to decide what the past was like (115).

²¹ See Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996) who writes that “experience shows that we should always prefer the natural hypothesis, or we shall fall into superstition” (55). Also see Robert Price in his debate with William Lane Craig, *Intellectual Foundations: Did Jesus of Nazareth Rise from the Dead?* Tape 1. C. F. Evans (1970) notes the difficulty is “that we have no criteria for judging an event which is strictly without parallel” (177). J. Moltmann, “The Resurrection of Christ: Hope for the World” in D'Costa, ed. (1996) observes that Troeltsch “certainly no longer has the last word today, even among historians.” Nevertheless, he finds Troeltsch's arguments strong enough that he cannot speak of Christ's resurrection as a historical event (78ff).

²² Dunn (2003), 876-7.

²³ Craffert (1989), 342. The social sciences usually are thought to include the arts and humanities. For our purposes, psychology and literature are the disciplines most often employed in a social scientific approach to biblical studies.

²⁴ Dunn (2003), 70. We may add that the strength of cumulative data is more important than analogous events as Pannenberg (1983) suggests: “Does not the postulate of the fundamental homogeneity of all events usually form the chief argument against the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, for example?”

Another weakness of the principle of analogy is that it makes it difficult to recognize unique events, and we may wonder whether it is “inevitably too restrictive.”²⁵ Philosopher Norman Geisler writes,

[I]f it were true that no present exception can overthrow supposed “laws” of nature based on our uniform experience in the past, then there could be no true progress in our scientific understanding of the world. . . . This is precisely what happened when certain outer-spatial “exceptions” to Newton’s law of gravitation were found and Einstein’s theory of relativity was considered broader and more adequate. Without established exceptions, no progress can be made in science. In short, Hume’s objections to miracles seem to be unscientific!²⁶

Does the principle of analogy allow for the possibility of an act of God or does it *a priori* rule it out? If we knew for a fact that God does not exist, the *a priori* exclusion of miracles would be justified. This is where the horizon of the historian discussed in the previous chapter factors into every historical investigation.²⁷ Accordingly, historians should neither presuppose nor *a priori* exclude the possibility of God’s intervention in human affairs.

The principle of analogy also appears to assume metaphysical naturalism, since it presupposes that miracles do not occur today.²⁸ But how is such an assumption justified without arguing in a circle? Another historian may hold that miracles do, in fact, occur today. “If miracles are presently occurring, then Troeltsch’s principle of analogy could be granted and used to *support* the reality of past miracles.”²⁹ Thus, the horizon of the historian plays a large role in their use of Troeltsch’s principle of analogy. Pannenberg explains,

If somebody considers it with David Hume (or today with John Dominic Crossan) to be a general rule, suffering no exception, that the dead remain

But if that is so, does not the opinion, which has come to be regarded as virtually self-evident, that the resurrection of Jesus cannot be a historical event, rest on a remarkably weak foundation? Only the particular characteristics of the reports about it make it possible to judge the historicity of the resurrection, not the prejudgment that every event must be fundamentally of the same kind as every other” (49, n90).

²⁵ Dunn (2003), 70.

²⁶ N. L. Geisler, “Miracles and the Modern Mind” in Geivett and Habermas, eds. (1997), 80-81. See also Dunn (2003), 106-07. We may also note that a resurrection may not be as *unscientific* as some may think. See F. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead* (New York: Doubleday, 1994). Even if Tipler is mistaken, his work demonstrates that a scientific explanation for the possibility of “resurrection” is available within the scientific enterprise.

²⁷ See also Bartholomew (2000), 112-13.

²⁸ Metaphysical naturalism is sometimes confused with methodological naturalism. The latter is the process by which a scientist or historian looks for a natural cause of an event. Although she does not rule out the possibility of a supernatural cause, she limits herself only to the consideration of the natural. Metaphysical naturalism goes further by claiming that everything has a natural cause. Supernatural causes are *a priori* ruled out as possibilities. Although little difference exists in practice between methodological naturalism and metaphysical naturalism, the latter is guided more by the metaphysics of the practitioner.

²⁹ F. J. Beckwith, “History and Miracles” in Geivett and Habermas, eds. (1997), 97. Also see Meier (1994), 516.

dead, then of course one cannot accept the Christian assertion that Jesus was raised. But then this is not a historical judgment but an ideological belief.³⁰

The principle of analogy is also limited by the knowledge and experience of the particular historian, which may be insufficient and misleading.

Our knowledge of the world around us is gained by gathering information. When we cast our net into the sea of experience, certain data turn up. If we cast our net into a small lake, we won't be sampling much of the ocean's richness. If we make a worldwide cast, we have a more accurate basis for what exists. Here is the crunch. If we cast into our own little lakes, it is not surprising if we do not obtain an accurate sampling of experience. However, a worldwide cast will reveal many reports of unusual occurrences that might be investigated and determined to be miracles. Surely most of the supernatural claims would be found to be untrustworthy. But before making the absolute observation that no miracles have ever happened, someone would have to investigate each report. It only takes a *single justified example* to show that there is more to reality than a physical world. We must examine an impossibly large mountain of data to justify the naturalistic conclusion assumed in this objection.³¹

It would be a seemingly impossible task to investigate every miracle claim, thus, rendering Hume's assertion that the uniform experience of reality supports the nonexistence of miracles equally impossible to support. Accordingly, C. S. Lewis notes,

[W]e know the experience against [miracles] to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.³²

If historians do not follow the principle of analogy, will they find themselves embracing superstitions? I see no reason why this must be the case if proper historical method is applied. We do not interpret *Aesop's Fables* as history because a highly plausible natural hypothesis is available considering genre. Miracle claims must be judged on an individual basis. Accordingly, the threat of superstition should not prohibit historians from proceeding while being careful to apply sound method.³³ Wright explains, "The natural/supernatural distinction itself, and the near-equation of

³⁰ Pannenberg (1998), 26.

³¹ Habermas and Licona (2004), 144. See also Habermas (2003), 6; Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005): "People do not want to be stigmatized, to have others think them shackled to superstition. But the censoring of testimony does not allow us to remain loyal to the realities of human experience; and although the facts are too little known, surveys from various parts of the world indicate that perceived contact with the dead is, however we interpreted, a regular part of cross-cultural experience" (271); Eddy and Boyd (2007): "No longer should scholars feel justified in calling their work 'critical' when they foreclose the nature of the conclusions they will find in their historical research by arbitrarily restricting the pool of experience they base their analogies upon to the myopic experience of their own secularized academic subculture" (82; cf. 67, 70); Witherington (2006), 5.

³² Lewis (1978), 102. See also Gregory (2006), 137-38.

³³ See Beaudoin (2006), 123. Viney (1989), while rejecting the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, maintains that "the strategies of Craig and Habermas are basically sound" (125).

‘supernatural’ with ‘superstition’, are scarecrows that Enlightenment thought has erected in its fields to frighten away anyone following the historical argument where it leads. It is high time the birds learned to take no notice.”³⁴

Finally, perhaps the most difficult challenge to the principle of analogy comes from Ben Meyer who asks,

When the principle of analogy was made to presuppose the impossibility of miracles, did it presuppose a grounded judgment or just an assumption? If it is grounded, what grounds it? Scientific knowledge? Philosophical reflection on scientific knowledge? Or what?³⁵

Meyer goes on to explain that it cannot be grounded in scientific knowledge since science does not seek to answer questions pertaining to these matters. Neither can the philosophy of science rule out the possibility of miracles, since scientific knowledge is empirical.³⁶ Accordingly, we observe a number of reasons why analogy does not prohibit historians from adjudicating on miracle claims.

2.2.3. Hume claims that antecedent probability lends strength to his use of analogy: “[W]e ought to give the preference to such as are founded on the greatest number of past observations.” Thus, if the greatest number of observations in the past is that when a person dies, he or she stays dead, a greater probability already exists that reports of a person returning to life from the dead are false.³⁷

As with the principle of analogy, several major problems beset an antecedent probability argument against the consideration of miracle claims by historians. First, unique and improbable events known to have occurred would have to be ruled out as the best (or most probable) explanation by historians. For example, we could never conclude that a specific lottery winner actually won, since the probability of anyone, much less a specific person, winning the lottery on a specific day is vastly outweighed by the probability that no one will win.³⁸ As a result, by placing too much value on

³⁴ Wright (2003), 707n63.

³⁵ Meyer (1979), 100.

³⁶ Pannenberg (1983) similarly remarks, “To be sure, the connection in cultural history between the development of historical method and the rise of modern anthropocentric philosophies of history cannot be dismissed by remarking, for instance, that this was only a matter of the accidental conditions involved in the origin of historical method. For there is indeed an anthropocentric element in the very structure of the methodological principles of historical criticism. The question is only whether this methodologically essential element must be bound up with an anthropocentric world view” (40).

³⁷ Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 244; Ehrman (2000), 166-67, 177-78; Ehrman’s comments in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12.

³⁸ In a debate on whether God exists between myself (theist) and Steve Yothman (atheist) held at the University of Georgia (Athens, GA. USA) on March 2, 2006, Yothman asserted that this type of argument is mistaken. In response to my argument that the chances of our universe being life-permitting rather than life-prohibiting and that life would exist on this planet are infinitesimally small, Yothman argued that I am mistaken, since the actual chances must be 1.0 (or 100%) because it occurred this way. I noted in my reply that this is a misunderstanding of how probability works. It would be similar to arguing that there was a 1.0 or 100% chance that the Pittsburgh Steelers would win the Super Bowl in 2006 and that this is evidenced by the fact that they did! One must consider the probabilities prior to the football season, not after the championship game.

antecedent probability in historical judgments, the historian is many times forced to make conclusions that are incorrect.³⁹

Second, when applied to the resurrection of Jesus, antecedent probability proves much less than Hume would hope. The failure of billions who have not returned from the dead only warrants the conclusion that the dead are not raised *by natural causes*. The Christian claim is not “Jesus is risen by natural causes.” The claim is “Jesus, the Son of God, is risen” or “God raised Jesus from the dead.”⁴⁰ Can historians *a priori* conclude that if Jesus is divine he cannot raise himself or that if God wanted to raise Jesus from the dead there is a high degree of probability that he cannot have done so? It would not appear so.⁴¹

A third problem with Hume’s antecedent probability argument is that, even if legitimate, it is only applicable when blind processes are involved. The principle does not work when enabled intentionality is present. Consider my example in the first chapter of my son lifting weights. The chances that an average twelve-year-old boy can lift two hundred pounds over his head are zero. However, if an external agent, such as a bodybuilder, were to enter the equation, the chances increase significantly to almost one hundred percent. Similarly, if a context exists where there is reason to believe God may have entered the equation, the chances that we have a genuine miracle on our hands may be greater than they are for naturalistic theories, such as myth, dream, or hallucination, especially if other data point away from these natural hypotheses. Flew comments, “Certainly given some beliefs about God, the occurrence of the resurrection does become enormously more likely.”⁴²

2.2.4. Hume’s fourth point is that miracle claims from religions conflicting with Christianity cancel out claims to Christian miracles. Serious problems beset this point as well. As Hume noted, most miracle claims are poorly attested. Miracle stories involving founders of several major world religions appear centuries after the purported events and are not usually corroborated by multiple sources or neutral-to-

³⁹ An antecedent probability argument would also abrogate a number of scientific beliefs commonly held with a high degree of confidence. For example, observable phenomena indicate that something cannot come out of nothing. There are no known exceptions to this rule. If something began to exist, it had a cause. However, nearly all modern cosmologists maintain that the “Big Bang” was the event that signified the birth of everything out of nothing. See Hawking and Penrose (1996), 20; Hoyle (1975), 658. Consequently, we would be forced to discard the Big Bang theory. Accordingly, Hume’s use of antecedent probability may actually be unscientific.

⁴⁰ “That Jesus rose naturally from the dead, that is to say, that all of the cells in his body spontaneously came back to life again, is a hypothesis so absurdly improbable that virtually all other explanations—hallucinations, apparent death, even E.T. abduction—will be more probable” (Craig’s comments in Copan and Tacelli, eds. [2000], 186).

⁴¹ Bartholomew (2000): “If Jesus Christ was what orthodoxy claims, he was not ‘as other men’ and hence there is no reason for assuming that what is true for all others was true for him. Hence there is no ground for pronouncing on the possibility of the resurrection from a scientific standpoint” (112). Accordingly, Cohn-Sherbok (1996) is mistaken when he finds the resurrection of Jesus “theoretically possible if God is all-powerful. Yet, like many other modern Jews, I find such an idea implausible because of the findings of contemporary science” (196). Dawes (1998) is likewise mistaken when he writes that “no historian could come to this conclusion [that ‘God raised Jesus from the dead’] without ceasing to act as a historian” (35). His reasons are “modern historians are reluctant to attribute any action to the direct intervention of God” and because no singular event such as a divine resurrection can overturn the probability of what is normally observed that the dead do not rise (35).

⁴² Quoted in Flew’s presence by Habermas from a personal correspondence between Flew and Miethe in Miethe, ed. (1987), 39.

hostile witnesses. However, the existence of counterfeit currency does not negate the existence of the genuine. In the same manner, poorly attested miracle claims are scarcely able to rule out well-evidenced ones. For example, if the resurrection of Jesus has good evidence for it, why should a single report of post-mortem appearances of Apollonius of Tyana made more than a century later be placed on equal ground? Our only extant biography comes from Philostratus writing around A.D. 225, 130 years after the death of Apollonius.⁴³ Philostratus informs us that his primary source for the life of Apollonius is Damis, whom most scholars maintain was a fictional figure invented by Philostratus who also claims that Damis's information ended prior to the death of Apollonius.⁴⁴ So, he continues his biography by supplementing Damis's information with reports from unnamed sources.⁴⁵ Belonging to this latter category are a number of reports of post-mortem appearances of Apollonius as a spirit being.⁴⁶ Only one is described in detail and it is not a resurrection. Instead, an unnamed person at an unidentified time sees Apollonius in a dream.⁴⁷ Apollonius believed in the immortality of the soul.⁴⁸ For him, post-mortem existence did not include a revivification of the corpse. Prior to his death, Apollonius invites Damis and Demetrius to take hold of his hand so that they may know he is alive, literally not a ghost that cannot be held, since he has not yet "cast aside" his body.⁴⁹ Contrast this with Jesus' invitation for his disciples to take hold of him after his resurrection so that they may know that he is not a spirit being without flesh and bones.⁵⁰ Thus, the post-mortem appearance reports of Philostratus are late, reported by only a single source, and never make the claim of a resurrection. Accordingly, Ehrman is mistaken when he writes,

To agree with an ancient person that Jesus healed the sick, walked on water, cast out a demon, or raised the dead is to agree, first, that there were divine persons (or magicians) walking the earth who could do such things and, second, that Jesus was one of them. . . . The evidence that is admitted in any one of these cases must be admitted in the others as well.⁵¹

Second, whereas several plausible explanations exist for most miracle claims, this may not be the case when we come to Jesus' resurrection.

Third, Hume seems to be unaware that, if either the Jewish or Christian view is true, genuine miracles could occur among unbelievers and be entirely compatible with these beliefs. For example, God acted among a nonbeliever by healing Naaman's leprosy.⁵² Although this point cannot here be defended, many accounts exist in our

⁴³ Very little remains that refers to Apollonius. See Lucian, "Alexander the False Prophet" 5 who speaks of him in negative terms and Origen (*Contra Celsum* 6.41.5-10) who notes that Moiregenes refers to Apollonius as a "magician and philosopher" (μάγιστος καὶ Φιλόσοφος), that he had "magical power" (μαγεία) and was a "swindler/imposter" (γόητα).

⁴⁴ Philostratus. *Apollonius of Tyana*, Jones, ed. and trans. (2005), 4-5.

⁴⁵ Philostratus 8.29.1.

⁴⁶ Philostratus 8.31.3. I have translated δαίμωνιους as "spirit being." A demon in this sense was a "transcendent incorporeal being" with a "status between humans and deities" (BDAG, 2000, 210).

⁴⁷ Philostratus 8.31.

⁴⁸ Philostratus 8.31.1.

⁴⁹ Philostratus 8.12.1. In 8.12.2 out of joy they hug Apollonius.

⁵⁰ Luke 24:39. See also John 20:27.

⁵¹ Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 242.

⁵² 2 Kings 5.

time of the paranormal that occur within a religious context. The Christian view allows that it might be God acting in these situations, or in some cases, that the observed phenomena are the works of demons.

Since we will consider testimonies in antiquity to have seen the risen Jesus, we must address a final statement of Hume's in relation to his fourth point.

But according to the principles here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.⁵³

Statistician David Bartholomew points out that Hume's use of the relative values of probabilities are being applied incorrectly.⁵⁴ He notes the study by Charles Babbage, the father of the computer.⁵⁵ Babbage demonstrated that if a number of individual witnesses could be shown to have no prior collusion, the chances they would agree on a falsehood would decrease as the number of witnesses increased.⁵⁶ Although Babbage's estimations could be significantly weakened by not taking certain factors into consideration, Bartholomew contends that his approach toward calculating such probabilities is correct in principle.⁵⁷ One must employ Bayes' Theorem and compare the improbabilities that x occurred with the improbability that n witnesses believed to

⁵³ Hume (1777), 127.

⁵⁴ Bartholomew (2000), 92-98.

⁵⁵ Bartholomew (2000) does not provide a source for Babbage's results. However, it is found in Charles Babbage, *The Ninth Bridgewater Treatise: A Fragment*, 2nd ed. (London: John Murray, Albemarle Street, 1938). Babbage's argument is likewise cited against Hume by statistician Zabell (1988), 344-45.

⁵⁶ See also Tucker (2005), 381; Davis (1983), 5-6.

⁵⁷ Such problems involve the unlikelihood of no collusion occurring, the understanding of what is a miracle on the part of the individuals involved, and that if counterwitnesses exist, the force of their testimony combined with the prior probability of a miracle's nonoccurrence may easily be higher than a greater number of witnesses testifying to the occurrence of a miracle. Tucker (2005) writes, "Usually, there are no multiple independent testimonies for any particular miracle hypothesis, and there is insufficient evidence for considering whether the evidence of some miracle is independent. Consequently, there is insufficient information to assign values to the variables, and therefore, the proposed formulae for computing the effects of multiple independent witnesses on the probabilities of miracles are not useful" (375). Citing Theissen and Winter (2002, 14-15), Eve (2005) asserts that the existence of multiple independent sources "establishes only the age of a tradition, not its authenticity" (26). My reading of Theissen and Winter differs from Eve's on this point. I understand them to be in agreement with Eve that multiple independent sources establish an early age of a tradition. However, they add that multiple independent sources can on occasion bring historians back to the event: "the argument for fixing the relative value of a source would be a positive criterion of authenticity only in an instance where we could be certain that two sources are related because they are independent witnesses of the event to which they commonly attest and thus, so to speak, represent two independent eyewitnesses. . . . In some cases we can be almost certain that we have independent sources that reach back to the history itself, namely, where we can compare Christian and non-Christian texts" (14). I agree with Eve when he writes, "The more widespread the notion of Jesus' miracle-working is among diverse independent sources, the harder it is to maintain, as Mack wants to, that this miracle-working is simply the invention of one particular Jesus-group. And the more diverse and widespread the miracle tradition is, the earlier its originating point is likely to be, and in that sense, the more likely it is that it may go back to the historical Jesus. But this is a long way from making the criterion of multiple attestation an automatic guarantor of *high* historical probability" (32). As with Tucker above, Eve likewise notes the problem of proving the independence of the sources and adds, "This would seem to be a problem endemic to any form of historical Jesus research obliged to rely solely on early Christian sources that share a large measure of common interests" (45).

be independent have colluded in order to report the miracle falsely. Accordingly, unless the prior probability of an event's occurrence is known in fact to be zero, there comes a point when the strength of the evidence may require one to admit that the prior probability assigned is incorrect and may rather support the opposite conclusion.⁵⁸

In light of his four arguments, Hume encourages us to ask a question when we face a miracle claim, particularly that of Jesus' resurrection: Which is less miraculous: that deceit is involved or that the dead man has risen? About forty years after Hume published his essay, Thomas Paine posited a very similar question: "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course, or that a man should tell a lie? We have never seen, in our time, nature go out of her course; but we have good reason to believe that millions of lies have been told in the same time; it is, therefore, at least millions to one, that the reporter of a miracle tells a lie."⁵⁹ Not only does Paine, like Hume, rule out all miracle claims of his time without investigation, his question requires qualifications, since the answer is largely based on whether one believes that God exists. If we assume that God does not exist, then of course it is more probable that men would lie than that nature would alter its course. However, if we are open to God's existence, we will need to ask at least three additional questions: (1) Is there good evidence that the event in question occurred? (2) Does a context exist in which we might expect a god to act? (3) Is there good evidence that those making the claim lied? If good evidence exists that the event occurred, a context exists where we might expect a god to act, and there is an absence of evidence for a lie, then there is no reason to believe that a lie is more probable than a miracle in a specific instance.

2.2.5. Although Hume's arguments attempt to prove that one is never justified in believing miracle reports, we have observed that his thesis contains many errors, only a few of which could be explored in this chapter. The problems with Hume's logic cast considerable doubt on his conclusions. Accordingly, while Hume's points correctly insist that historians be cautious when investigating specific miracle claims, the profound weaknesses in them do not prohibit historians from adjudicating on miracle claims.

Before moving along, it is important to note that Hume specifically cited the miracle of a resurrection as impossible to prove:

It is no miracle that a man, seemingly in good health, should die on a sudden: because such a kind of death, though more unusual than any other, has yet been frequently observed to happen. But it is a miracle, that a dead man should come to life; because that has never been observed in any age or country. There must, therefore, be a uniform experience against every miraculous

⁵⁸ Ehrman is mistaken when he argues that numerous miracle reports do not increase the probability of the historicity of a particular miracle because every miracle report itself is improbable: "in every single instance you have to evaluate whether it's a probable event or not. And it never can be a probable event" (Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman [2006], 33). While it is certainly true that numerous reports of a *poor quality* do not add up to a good one, Babbage and Bartholomew seem correct to me if we add a caveat requiring that the numerous reports of miracles be of a *good quality*. Such may indeed indicate that the antecedent probability Ehrman assigns to miracles is incorrect.

⁵⁹ Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason* (1794), Part 1, chapter 17. An electronic text of Paine is offered by the University of Adelaide Library at <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/p/paine/thomas/p147a/reason2.html> (accessed July 14, 2008).

event, otherwise the event would not merit that appellation. And as a uniform experience amounts to a proof, there is here a direct and full proof, from the nature of the fact, against the existence of any miracle; nor can such a proof be destroyed, or the miracle rendered credible, but by an opposite proof, which is superior.⁶⁰

Hume argues that human history provides a uniform experience that the dead are not raised (in fact, he adds, such has never been observed in any age or country). This is why a claim to a resurrection is regarded as a miracle. This uniform experience is full proof that miracles do not occur and prohibits any evidence no matter how good from overturning this conclusion. In other words, the fact that no one has ever observed the dead return to life is conclusive proof that the dead do not rise and no evidence could ever overturn this conclusion because of its improbability. Hume's objection begs the question, since he assumes what he must prove. How can Hume claim that it "has never been observed in any age or country" that "a dead man should come to life" when numerous reports exist that this is precisely what happened in the case of Jesus? Hume must demonstrate that the reports of the dead returning to life are mistaken.

Hume's treatment of miracle persists in its influence. Just as Darwin's initial theory of evolution has been modified in order to account for its weaknesses exposed during the past century and a half, Hume's arguments have likewise been modified and can be recognized to some extent in the writings of a number of non-theists and even theists. Although we have observed numerous fallacies in Hume's arguments, he challenges us to think through a number of areas in the philosophy of history, such as how to identify a miracle and how to consider a miracle claim without opening wide the floodgates of credulity. He warns some of us concerning our partiality toward miracle claims found in our chosen religious system. For this, we are in debt to Hume.

2.3. C. Behan McCullagh

In his book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, McCullagh lays out a number of methods employed by historians to arrive at a conclusion of "historical." Arguments to the best explanation can be said to warrant a positive conclusion when seven criteria are met.⁶¹ Having described each of the criteria in detail, McCullagh provides a few illustrations. His first is the resurrection of Jesus.

One example which illustrates the conditions most vividly is discussion of the Christian hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead. This hypothesis is of greater explanatory scope and power than other hypotheses which try to account for the relevant evidence, but it is less plausible and more *ad hoc* than they are. That is why it is difficult to decide on the evidence whether it should be accepted or rejected.⁶²

⁶⁰ Hume (1777), 115.

⁶¹ McCullagh (1985), 19, 29. See chapter 1.3.2.

⁶² McCullagh (1984), 21. It is interesting to note that he here cites Marxsen (1970) and C. F. Evans (1970) as those clearly explaining the issues involved.

McCullagh defines plausibility as something that is probable given the particular views or presuppositions of a historian.⁶³ For example, if a historian holds that God does not exist, he will also hold that Jesus' resurrection is implausible. However, if he holds that God exists, that he acts within human history, and that Christianity is probably true, he is most likely to hold that Jesus' resurrection is quite plausible.⁶⁴ *Ad hocness* is not to be confused with plausibility or a lack of explanatory scope. When a hypothesis is not rendered probable by the total available evidence, it must be regarded as *ad hoc*.⁶⁵ McCullagh goes on to explain that

[a]d hocness and lack of plausibility are not reasons for thinking a hypothesis false, or at least they are not reasons for thinking it is more likely to be false than true. Implausibility and disconfirmation, however, can provide reasons for this conclusion. For a hypothesis to be implausible, our present knowledge of the world must imply that it is probably false. And for a hypothesis to be disconfirmed is for one of its implications to be false, which means the hypothesis itself is probably false.⁶⁶

Why then does McCullagh think it difficult to make a decision on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus? Does he hold that the theistic worldview required to allow it is implausible, in other words, that it is contrary to our present knowledge of the world? Is the hypothesis "Jesus rose from the dead" not rendered "probable" by all of the available evidence? The answer may be found a few pages later.

For even if a hypothesis is of greater explanatory scope and power than another, if evidence incompatible with it cannot be explained away satisfactorily, then it is abandoned. Historians simply assume, as do most people, that the world is logically and materially consistent, so that for beliefs about it to be true, they must refer to compatible events and states of affairs. . . . [Given this,] if two hypotheses are not implausible or disconfirmed, then even if one is more *ad hoc* than another, if it has greater explanatory scope and power it will be preferred.⁶⁷

It is somewhat confusing why McCullagh regards it as difficult to decide on the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.⁶⁸ A theory that lacks plausibility is not the same as one that is implausible. McCullagh himself acknowledges this distinction.⁶⁹ The former is in a neutral position, whereas the latter exists in a negative one. According to McCullagh, the hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead is only "less plausible" than competing theories.⁷⁰ This could even allow its plausibility factor in the positive zone. He then says that even if one hypothesis is more *ad hoc* than others, it is to be preferred if it possesses greater explanatory scope and power.⁷¹

⁶³ McCullagh (1984), 23-24.

⁶⁴ We may add that the agnostic historian who judges the data for or against God's existence as inconclusive may pass on making a decision regarding the historicity of miracle claims. However, it would be an unjustified step to claim that if an event cannot be proved that it is, therefore, disproved.

⁶⁵ McCullagh (1984), 24.

⁶⁶ McCullagh (1984), 27.

⁶⁷ McCullagh (1984), 28.

⁶⁸ McCullagh (1984), 21.

⁶⁹ McCullagh (1984), 27.

⁷⁰ McCullagh (1984), 21.

⁷¹ McCullagh (1984), 28

According to McCullagh, the resurrection hypothesis possesses this trait.⁷² So, why the difficulty? Appealing to Feyerabend⁷³ he writes,

Competing theories about the nature of the world cannot be compared because each theory provides the terms in which observations relevant to it are to be made, and so there is not any common domain of facts of which it can be said that one theory or hypothesis is a better explanation than another.⁷⁴

McCullagh asks us to consider the following hypotheses: (1) Jesus had supernatural powers. (2) Jesus did not have supernatural powers. The historian who admits the possibility of the former is more likely to hold that Jesus in fact performed miracles, whereas the historian who rejects the possibility of the supernatural is likely to hold the latter. McCullagh then concludes:

So what constituted the prime domain of evidence for one historian could be almost entirely denied by another. It would seem that here is a perfect case of the sort of incommensurability which Feyerabend was discussing.⁷⁵

In the end, it seems that for McCullagh, a positive judgment for the historicity of Jesus' resurrection cannot be awarded because such a judgment is contingent upon the worldviews of individual historians and these are often in stark, irreconcilable disagreement. McCullagh is not alone. Dunn explains that "[a]s interpretation, the resurrection of Jesus constituted a perspective on reality which determined how reality itself was conceived."⁷⁶ He concludes that the "resurrection of Jesus is not so much a historical fact as a foundational fact or meta-fact."⁷⁷

I do not think this a good reason for historians to punt to philosophers and theologians rather than making a historical judgment. Why should historians refuse to make judgments when colliding worldviews exist? As stated in the previous chapter, historical descriptions offered by historians without exception are heavily influenced by their race, gender, nationality, values, political and religious convictions, concepts of the external world and of history itself.⁷⁸ This results more often than not in a pluralism even in matters that are not religious in nature. A Marxist approach to history, which attempts to explain the past as the result of social movements of working classes rather than rulers, will usually yield historical narratives in conflict with those generated from other approaches. Yet, historians do not suggest that they cannot write histories of the American Revolution or the Vietnam War since a degree of incommensurableness presents itself when Marxist descriptions differ from those provided by non-Marxist historians.

Historians are required to make numerous philosophical assumptions before entering every historical investigation. For example, they assume the external world is real.

⁷² McCullagh (1984), 21.

⁷³ Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1975), chapter 17.

⁷⁴ McCullagh (1984), 28.

⁷⁵ McCullagh (1984), 28.

⁷⁶ Dunn (2003), 878. Braaten (1999) refers to the resurrection of Jesus as the "deepest fault line . . . where faith and unbelief meet within the churches, among their pastors and theologians" (147).

⁷⁷ Dunn (2003), 878.

⁷⁸ See chapter 1.2.2.

They assume our senses provide a fairly accurate perception of the external world. They assume logic facilitates us in our quest for truth rather than merely being a pragmatic tool that aims at our survival and quality of life. They assume natural laws in effect today were in effect in antiquity and that they operated in a similar manner. More importantly, the majority of historians assume that history is at least partially knowable.⁷⁹ Whereas the vast majority of all historians agree on most of these assumptions, a number of postmodernists take issue with some of them, especially the last. For these, not only is a historical judgment on Jesus' resurrection out of the question, so is every other past event. Yet, this does not keep realist historians from making historical judgments. Each of the five assumptions just mentioned is purely philosophical in nature. While good reasons exist for holding a realist view of history over a postmodern approach, at the end of the day, realist and postmodernist positions are based on assumptions that cannot be defended to a point beyond all doubt.⁸⁰

Thus far, I have only suggested that historians need only be in a position where they neither presuppose nor *a priori* exclude theism but instead maintain a position of openness while examining the data. However, let us assume for a moment that historians must select a metaphysical grid from which to operate. If they have the liberty to proceed with these five philosophical assumptions, should they be prohibited from adopting a sixth philosophical assumption that involves the existence of a God who acts in history?⁸¹ Such an assumption is not without merit. During the past forty-five years, many scientists and philosophers have discovered volumes of data from recent advances in astrophysics and molecular biology that they believe imply an intelligent Creator and Designer of our universe who purposefully intended the existence of life on earth.⁸² This evidence has been so compelling to some that a

⁷⁹ McCullagh (1984) himself lists four similar assumptions (1). Gorman (2000) speaks of debates among historians concerning whether the meaning of historical *truth* is a matter for historians or philosophers (253). Rex Martin (2006) comments that historians always “make philosophical presuppositions” when writing their books (253). He adds that “historians need philosophy to do their work as historians better” (260).

⁸⁰ McCullagh (1984) admits, “The truth of these four assumptions [behind realism] cannot be proved, as philosophers have been tireless in explaining. We have no access to reality independent of our beliefs and experiences of it, so we cannot check in a God-like manner upon their truth. We are justified in holding them because it is useful to do so; indeed we may even be psychologically incapable of doing otherwise” (1).

⁸¹ Indeed, McCullagh (2000) elsewhere comments that when historians write the history of historical concepts that are essentially contested (as examples he names religion, art, science, democracy, and social justices) “they must choose an interpretation of the subject to guide them” (47). In *Logic of History* (2004) he writes, “When historians draw inferences about the past and go on to test them, they bring with them a heap of beliefs about nature, society and history, which they assume to be true. . . . The rationality and credibility of their conclusions is always relative to that of the assumptions they employed in reaching them. This is a matter of no concern, so long as those assumptions are themselves well supported by other perceptions, scientifically validated you might say. If the assumptions are rationally credible, then so may be the historical inferences which depend upon them” (43-44). Elsewhere, after acknowledging that “we cannot know for certain that historical descriptions are true,” McCullagh (2005) suggests that “[t]his is where pragmatism asserts itself. In order to act in the world, in our own and other’s interests, we must decide what the world is like, or to put it another way, which descriptions of the world to believe. It is reasonable to believe those that best explain available evidence, and that are well supported by evidence, if only because these are most often confirmed by further experiences. . . . When evidential reasons do not prove the truth of a belief beyond all possibility of error, pragmatic reasons can give us a good reason for believing it true nevertheless” (454).

⁸² See Behe (1996); Collins (2006); Dembski, ed. (1998); Denton (1998); Gonzalez and Richards (2004); Schroeder (1997). See also John D. Barrow, Frank J. Tipler, and John A. Wheeler, *The*

reversal of worldview occurs. For example, Antony Flew, one of the most prominent and influential atheist philosophers of the twentieth century, recently abandoned his atheist views in the face of what he regarded as compelling evidence for the existence of God from relatively recent finds in the fields of astrophysics and molecular biology.⁸³ Similarly, the prominent cosmologist Frank Tipler moved from atheism to theism, having been impressed with the data in astrophysics that pointed to a Designer of the cosmos.

In addition, a number of medical studies have reported double-blind experiments where neither the patients nor the physician leading the study knew which patients were being prayed for. The studies revealed that prayer seemed to have a positive impact on the healing process.⁸⁴ Likewise, since it was a double-blind experiment, the placebo effect is insufficient for explaining the data supporting the position that prayer is effective. Moreover, scholars Dale Allison and Craig Keener claim to have had experiences of apparitions that are more at home within theism than atheism.⁸⁵ These cannot simply be dismissed *a priori*.⁸⁶

Anthropic Cosmological Principle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon & Schuster; reprint ed., 1984). Arno Penzias won a Nobel Prize for his 1964 discovery which confirmed the Big Bang Theory. In a personal email to me dated July 24, 2002, Penzias confirmed that he agreed with a statement attributed to him but for which I could find no reference. The statement is, "Astronomy leads us to a unique event, a universe which was created out of nothing, and delicately balanced to provide exactly the conditions required to support life. In the absence of an absurdly-improbable accident, *the observations of modern science* [ital. mine] seem to suggest an underlying, one might say, supernatural plan." Atheist philosopher Quentin Smith (2001) notes that anywhere from one fourth to one third of all professional philosophers today are theists and that "many of the leading thinkers in the various disciplines of philosophy, ranging from philosophy of science (e.g., Van Frassen) to epistemology (e.g., Moser), [are] theists." This article is available for online viewing at http://www.philoonline.org/library/smith_4_2.htm (accessed August 29, 2006). In light of this, Segal and Tucker are either out of touch with the current state of dialogue on the subject or have turned a blind eye to those intellects who are persuaded by the case for intelligent design. Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006) refers to arguments for intelligent design posited by these scientists as merely being "Scientific creation 2.0" (138). Tucker (2004) claims that the community of creationists "is quite homogenous, composed exclusively of biblical fundamentalists, almost all of whom are American Protestants. Their bias in favor of an anachronistic, historically insensitive interpretation of Genesis is the best explanation of their beliefs" (34). Tucker seems only aware of "young earth" or "recent" creationists. However, not all scientists who embrace intelligent design are Christians and even a strong majority of scientists and philosophers who are evangelical Christians are "old earth" creationists, embracing a dating of 4.5 billion years as the age of the earth and 12-15 billion years as the age of the universe. The difference is that they express hesitations toward neo-Darwinism, maintaining that the scientific data favors either special creation or theistic evolution.

⁸³ Flew in Flew and Habermas (2004), 197-211. Consider the following statements by Flew: "I think the argument to Intelligent Design is enormously stronger than it was when I first met it" (200) and "It now seems to me that the findings of more than fifty years of DNA research have provided materials for a new and enormously powerful argument to design" (201).

⁸⁴ Byrd (1988): 826-29. See also W. S. Harris, M. Gowda, J. W. Kolb, C. P. Strychacz, J. L. Vacek, P. G. Jones, A. Forker, J. H. O'Keefe, B. D. McCallister, "A Randomized, Controlled Trial of the Effects of Remote, Intercessory Prayer on Outcomes in Patients Admitted to the Coronary Care Unit," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 159 (Oct. 25, 1999), 2273-78. I am indebted to Gary Habermas for these references.

⁸⁵ Allison (2005), 275-77; Keener (2003), 1:267. See also Eddy and Boyd (2007), who claim to have witnessed phenomena difficult to recognize on naturalistic terms which they regard as demonization and exorcisms (69). I am not in agreement with Jewish scholar Cohn-Sherbok in D'Costa, ed. (1996) who regards the idea of an omnipotent God "implausible because of the findings of contemporary science" (196). To the contrary, it is my opinion that many of the results of contemporary science strongly point to an intelligent Designer of a sort and that reality is far more complex than materialists maintain. Habermas (1995) contends that naturalists are "mistaken if they think that the advances of

Thus, the historian would be epistemically justified in embracing a theistic worldview when making historical considerations.⁸⁷ After all, why should an atheist or agnostic worldview be awarded a default position, especially when good data exists for a theistic reality?⁸⁸ Additionally, if a significant majority of those in modern society hold a theistic worldview, how can an assumption of theism be regarded as *ad hoc*?⁸⁹ Those historians who are not as sanguine may provide reasons why they do not agree with a theistic horizon and why their historical conclusions are different.⁹⁰ However, this does not prohibit theistic historians from proceeding any more than postmodern historians prohibit realists from proceeding. Therefore, this hesitancy on the part of McCullagh and others is unwarranted.

McCullagh has once again raised the challenge of horizons for our consideration. As we observed in the previous chapter, historians differ widely on these and must defend the metaphysical component of their horizon in so far as it impacts their historical hypotheses. This will especially apply when we investigate the resurrection

science make supernatural belief obsolete” (126; cf. 10, 144-146). Templeton laureate J. Polkinghorne (2006) writes, “Science simply tells us that these events [miracles] are against normal expectation. We knew this at the start. Science cannot exclude the possibility that, on particular occasions, God does particular, unprecedented things. After all, God is the ordainer of the laws of nature, not someone who is subject to them” (100). Polkinghorne goes on to say that “precisely because they are *divine* laws, simply to overturn them would be for God to act against God, which is absurd” (100). However, “the consequences of these laws can change spectacularly when one moves into a new regime” (100-01).

⁸⁶ Hurtado (*How on Earth*, 2005) writes, “it appears to be either ideological bias or insufficiently examined assumptions that prevent some scholars from taking seriously the idea that there are revelatory religious experiences that can directly contribute to religious innovations” (191).

⁸⁷ Baxter (1999) argues that theistic historians are justified in arriving at the historical conclusion that Jesus rose from the dead, although the logic employed does not render the conclusion by the theist as *necessary* (32-34).

⁸⁸ Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996) writes, “The decision to exclude God from the public understanding of reality is of course not a specifically historical issue. It is not among the tools of historical critical method. But it impinges upon the use of that method” (64). He adds, “Accepting the affirmation of Jesus’ resurrection as an event in history on the one hand, and the role of historical reason on the other, can go together, if the concept of history allows a place for God in the reality of historical processes” (71). Padgett (1998) writes, “[W]ho is to say that Christian faith does not give us better insight into the data than unbelief does? Why should unbelief, rather than faith, lead to the best explanation of the evidence? Would it be so strange if the followers of Jesus have an inside track in the understanding of Jesus? . . . Granted that faith is a kind of prejudice, perhaps it is a helpful prejudice. Helpful prejudices can give us insight into data, and clear the way for understanding” (294-95).

⁸⁹ Cladis (2006) writes, “Among the majority of the planet’s inhabitants, including those in North America, religion is thriving” (94, cf. 96). In support, see the Pew Forum U. S. Religious Landscapes Survey which interviewed 36,000 Americans and then published “Religious Beliefs and Practices: Diverse and Politically Relevant” (June 2008): <http://religions.pewforum.org/pdf/report2-religious-landscape-study-full.pdf> (accessed June 26, 2008). The report concluded that 92% of U. S. adults believe in the existence of God or an impersonal force/universal spirit (5, 9), 79% believe that “miracles still occur today as in ancient times” (11), and 74% believe in an afterlife (10). Meier cites a 1989 Gallup poll which found that “82 percent of Americans polled believed that ‘even today, miracles are performed by the power of God.’ . . . Indeed, only 6 percent of all Americans polled by Gallup completely disagreed with the proposition that even today God works miracles.” Referring to Bultmann’s statement regarding the impossibility of using modern conveniences and also believing in miracles (Bultmann, “New Testament and Mythology,” 5), Meier (1994) asks if it is more plausible to conclude that only six percent of Americans qualify as modern persons or “that only 6 percent of Americans share the mind-set of some German university professors” (520-21). Cited from G. Gallup, Jr. and J. Castelli, *The People’s Religion: American Faith in the 90’s* (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 58.

⁹⁰ Craffert (1989): “the historical study of the New Testament will have to include a debate on 20th century world-views” (343).

of Jesus. Historians here should start from a neutral position, assuming neither the existence nor the non-existence of God, and proceed to make their case.

2.4. John P. Meier

Meier maintains that the modern person can believe in miracles.⁹¹ However, he adds that professional historians cannot assign a judgment of “historical” to a miracle claim.⁹²

[I]t is inherently impossible for historians working with empirical evidence within the confines of their own discipline ever to make the positive judgment: “God has directly acted here to accomplish something beyond all human power.” The very wording of this statement is *theo*-logical (*God* has directly acted . . .”). What evidence and criteria could justify a historian *as a historian* in reaching such a judgment? . . . Hence it is my contention that a positive judgment that a miracle has taken place is always a philosophical or theological judgment.⁹³

Meier goes on to explain that after a historian has completed an exhaustive investigation on a possible miraculous event, he may affirm that no reasonable natural cause is known, that the event took place in a context charged with religious significance, and that some witnesses claimed, even believed, that it was a miracle. However, his job ends there in his capacity as a historian.⁹⁴ “[T]o move beyond such affirmations and to reach the conclusion that God indeed has directly caused this inexplicable event is to cross the line separating the historian from the philosopher or theologian.”⁹⁵ Peter Carnley agrees: “The historian cannot say that the raised Jesus was seen in a vision without himself becoming a man of faith. . . . He must *qua* historian hold his peace.”⁹⁶ Similarly, Theissen and Winter write, “There can be no doubt that the Easter *faith* of human beings is a historical event. But the reality to which it wants to point is no more ‘historical’ than the creation *ex nihilo*, which can never be the subject of historical research on the basis of sources. Events in the realm beyond death are fundamentally removed from the historian’s work. . . . With the Easter *faith*, on the other hand, we have the convictions of human beings that are subject to historical investigation, to which all the premises and methods of historical–critical research apply.”⁹⁷

⁹¹ Meier (1994), 521.

⁹² Meier (1994) does not classify the resurrection of Jesus as a miracle because it does not fit his definition of miracle (529). The first component of his definition is that “a miracle involves an event that is in principle perceivable by all interested and fair-minded observers” (512). Since Jesus’ post-mortem appearances were not afforded to everyone according to Acts 10:40-41, it does not meet his criteria for a miracle. However, this is an odd component for any definition of miracle, since the difference consists in the audience rather than the act. Moreover, Meier does not seem to exclude a resurrection in general from being a miracle; only Jesus’ resurrection as reported in Acts 10. It should be noted that *defining* “miracle” and providing criteria for *identifying* one are separate discussions.

⁹³ Meier (1994), 513-14. See also Allison (*Resurrecting Jesus*, 2005) who takes a similar position (350-51). However, it does not prevent him from trying (199n2); Wedderburn (1999), 96.

⁹⁴ So also Dunn (2003), 875; C. A. Evans (2006), 139; L. T. Johnson (1996), 136; Tilley (2003), 14.

⁹⁵ Meier (1994), 514.

⁹⁶ Carnley (1987), 89.

⁹⁷ Theissen and Winter (2002), 250. If the earliest apostolic proclamation was that Jesus rose spiritually rather than in his transformed corpse and that their experiences of the post-Easter Jesus were visions,

Meier underestimates the weight of a context charged with religious significance. If no reasonable natural explanations are available to the historian and the event under investigation occurs in a context charged with religious significance, is the historian *as historian* left only with the conclusion that we have an anomaly? In answer, let us see if reasonable criteria exist for differentiating between an anomaly and a miracle. William Lane Craig asserts that “if a purported miracle occurs in a significant religio-historical context, then the chances of its being a genuine miracle are increased.”⁹⁸ Meier gladly allows historians to acknowledge a significantly religious context. Such a context is his third component for identifying a miracle.⁹⁹ However, for him, this is not enough to overcome the inability of historians to conclude that a miracle has occurred.

How important is context? A similar question is presently being asked in science related to the challenges of arriving at the conclusion that an intelligent Designer is responsible for the universe and life. Can the scientist *qua* scientist make this conclusion? Since atoms have not been stamped “Made by God,” an important question that has risen as a result of the dialogue is “How do we identify something that is designed?” William Dembski has proposed that we may infer design when *specified complexity* is present.¹⁰⁰ For something to be *specifically complex*, it must (1) exhibit complexity to an extent that it is extremely unlikely for it to be the result of natural processes and (2) exhibit a pattern that we normally affiliate with a personal agent. Dembski argues that scientists employ these criteria in forensics, artificial intelligence, cryptography, archaeology, and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI).¹⁰¹ Since scientists are able to detect design using the criteria of *specified complexity*, if they employ the same criteria to the universe and life and the criteria are met, then there is no reason why the scientist, *as scientist*, cannot infer design, and design implies a Designer.

We may approach the historicity of miracles in a similar manner. Just as scientists are not asking “What is design?” we are not here addressing the question “What is a miracle?”¹⁰² Rather, as the scientist asks, “What criteria are necessary for identifying design?” the historian asks, “What criteria are necessary for identifying when a miracle has occurred?” Since most philosophers and theologians agree that a miracle has occurred when the event has a divine cause, recognizing that an event is a miracle is much like recognizing that something is the product of an intelligent Designer. I would like to suggest that if we modify Dembski’s criteria for *specified complexity*, we can formulate miracle-identifying criteria that are conceptually and pragmatically correct. We may recognize that an event is a miracle when the event (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. In other words, the event occurs in a context where we might expect a god to act. The stronger the

then we might say that Jesus’ resurrection is beyond reach of historical conclusion. However, as we will see, the data does not indicate that this was their proclamation.

⁹⁸ Moreland and Craig (2003), 569. See also Rex Martin (2005) who contends that historians must look to antecedent and subsequent (aftermath) matters (147).

⁹⁹ Meier (1994), 513.

¹⁰⁰ Dembski (1999), chapter 5.

¹⁰¹ Dembski (1999), 127.

¹⁰² As mentioned in note 3 above, “miracle” is an essentially contested concept. Numerous definitions for “miracle” are provided.

context is charged in this direction, the stronger the evidence becomes that we have a miracle on our hands.

David Hume provided a hypothetical example of reports concerning Queen Elizabeth returning to life after her death.

But suppose, that all the historians who treat of ENGLAND, should agree, that, on the first of JANUARY 1600, Queen ELIZABETH died; that both before and after her death she was seen by her physicians and the whole court, as is usual with persons of her rank; that her successor was acknowledged and proclaimed by the parliament; and that, after being interred a month, she again appeared, resumed the throne, and governed ENGLAND for three years: I must confess that I should be surprized at the concurrence of so many odd circumstances, but should not have the least inclination to believe so miraculous an event. I should not doubt of her pretended death, and of those other public circumstances that followed it: I should only assert it to have been pretended, and that it neither was, nor possibly could be real.¹⁰³

If for a moment we assume with Hume that his example reflected actual reports, what if the historian likewise had credible data supporting the conclusion that the Queen had claimed to be a prophetess and that she had performed a number of acts during her lifetime that convinced both herself and others that she possessed a degree of supernatural power? And what if she had predicted her death and resurrection? Although the historian may have grave hesitations when attempting to make a judgment on whether the Queen had actually risen from the dead, such a context could only complicate matters for skeptics, since according to Hume's example, a great deal of strong data exists for the reality of the event. If either the data supporting her death and post-mortem appearances or her claims and actions were weak, this would significantly weaken any case purporting that the Queen had, in fact, risen from the dead. However, the inverse seems likewise true: If both the data supporting her post-mortem appearances and her claims and actions were strong, this would significantly strengthen any case purporting the Queen had in fact risen. And what if there were no plausible natural explanations for the event to boot? A significant difference exists between David Hume's example of the reports of the death of Queen Elizabeth and her post-mortem appearances and reports of the death and post-mortem appearances of Jesus of Nazareth. The life of the Queen was not earmarked with claims or deeds that would seem at home with post-mortem appearances. The life of Jesus was. Moreover, the historical matrix in which the data for Jesus' resurrection appears is charged with religious significance as we will observe in a moment, whereas the life of the Queen enjoys no such context.

Tucker asserts "if a disease such as cancer goes into remission without treatment, this is a meaningful event that has no scientific explanation. However, science cannot explain many things because relevant evidence or theories are missing. Events that have no scientific explanation do not break the laws of nature."¹⁰⁴ I am in complete agreement with Tucker. Notwithstanding, let us define a context in which a cancer patient goes into remission. Let us suppose that Katja has been experiencing severe

¹⁰³ Hume (1777), 128.

¹⁰⁴ Tucker (2005), 379.

upper abdominal pain that radiates to her back. She notices a yellowing of her skin and of the whites of her eyes. She has no appetite, is depressed, and has lost a considerable amount of weight. An entrepreneur and never one to take time off from work, Katja finally visits her physician and, after undergoing a number of tests, is diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer and given less than six months to live. Distressed over the news, she leaves the office in tears with an appointment to return the following day. In the morning, the physician and staff discuss among one another how each had experienced a dream that evening in which they either saw Katja cancer-free or in which they were told by an angelic being that it was not Katja's time to die and that she has been healed. When Katja arrives for her appointment, the staff are surprised to observe her positive countenance and hear her describe how for some unknown reason her pain and jaundice had vanished. The physician re-administers the tests and finds Katja to be completely cancer-free. Because the context in which Katja's remission occurs is charged with religious significance, I see no reason why the physician cannot declare that a miracle has occurred.

Perhaps another scenario may be helpful. Let us suppose the existence of a fifty-year-old man named David who was born blind, is an atheist, and has never prayed to be given sight. One Saturday afternoon while he and his wife are talking in their living room, David receives sight for no reason apparent to either of them. In his excitement he undergoes a thorough medical examination by a lifelong friend who is a highly regarded ophthalmologist and who informs him there is no medical explanation for why he now sees. Is the physician *as physician* justified in concluding that a miracle has occurred? It seems the only warranted answer in this scenario is 'no.' Perhaps it was a miracle. Perhaps it is an anomaly. They may never know.

Let us now alter some of the details of our scenario. Let us suppose the existence of the same fifty-year-old man named David who was born blind, is an atheist, and has never prayed to be given sight. One Saturday afternoon while he and his wife are talking in their living room, they hear someone knock on their front door. When David's wife opens the door, she is greeted by a local Baptist pastor who is hesitant but speaks: "Please excuse my interruption. A number of us were praying at the church just thirty minutes ago when three of us had the simultaneous thought that someone should come to your charming home on the corner and share the words from the first verse of an old hymn named *Amazing Grace*. So with your patience, here they are: 'Amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see.' Again, please excuse my uninvited visit. May God bless you both." The pastor then leaves. David's wife closes the door and returns to find her husband in complete joy and astonishment. He looks at her and says, "As soon as he said 'was blind but now I see' I could see!" David visits the same ophthalmologist who provides a thorough medical examination and informs him there is no medical explanation for why he now sees. Is the physician *as physician* justified in concluding that a miracle has occurred? I would like to suggest that he is. What is the difference between the two scenarios? The latter occurred in a context charged with religious significance.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ One cannot here dispute the conclusion that a miracle has occurred by simply defaulting to metaphysical naturalism. In other words, a metaphysical naturalist cannot argue that since a miracle contradicts the known fact that miracles do not occur, this specific miracle claim is disconfirmed. The argument begs the question, since our atheist's receiving sight at the word of a holy man may be the defeater for metaphysical naturalism.

When we consider the question of the resurrection of Jesus, a context exists that may assist us in identifying a miracle. Meier may object that this is precisely why the modern person is justified in *believing* that a miracle has occurred. But the physician *acting in his capacity as a physician* is incapable of drawing that conclusion, since the claim in our earlier example that *God* imparted sight to David is theological or philosophical in nature. Miracle claims are outside of historical investigation and, therefore, the historian acting in his capacity as a historian is incapable of drawing the conclusion that a miracle occurred.

I do not think Meier's reasoning warrants his conclusion. As we noted earlier in our discussion of McCullagh's objection, historians come with a number of philosophical commitments prior to any and every historical inquiry. Yet, this does not prohibit them from proceeding. It is both common and necessary for historians, philosophers, and theologians to cross disciplines. Historians neglecting to do this may unknowingly produce poor results.¹⁰⁶ Philosophers of science must have an understanding of the principles of science in order to act in their capacity. I was acting in the capacity of a philosopher of history when I wrote this chapter and the previous one. Archaeologists are significantly assisted in piecing together a detailed history of their sites by a study of the ancient texts describing them. When a biblical scholar seeks to comprehend the pathological effects of scourging and crucifixion in order to gain insights into Jesus' death, it is doubtful she would be accused of stepping outside of her capacity as a historian, although she will be opening herself up to criticism from medical experts in the process. Why then are philosophical considerations off-limits to a historian? No reason exists *a priori* why philosophy is restricted to professional philosophers. These are artificial boundaries. This becomes especially clear when we consider that some biblical scholars may also have training in philosophy while some philosophers may also be trained in historiography. Although Allison and Habermas are friends, I doubt Allison would be content with the following dialogue:

Allison: My training and work have been in the fields of biblical historiography and exegesis. Accordingly, since Jesus' resurrection requires

¹⁰⁶ See Shaw (2001), 9; Barrera (2001), 205; R. Evans (1999), 10; Fischhoff in Kahneman, Slovic, Tversky, eds. (1982), 350; Gilderhus (2007), 111-12; Harvey (1996), 55-56; Lorenz (1994), 298, cf. 312; McIntyre (2001), 7, 14. See also Vann (2004), 3. McIntyre (2001) notes the "strong similarities" between the disciplines of history and theology (2) while Barclay (1996) opines that "historical and theological enterprises have effected a remarkably fruitful marriage in biblical scholarship" (28). Hexter (*History Primer*, 1971) notes the lack of dialogue between philosophers and historians. As a result, some historians have "a rather special gift for leaping aboard intellectually sinking ships and drawing their innocent followers along with them" (110). R. J. Miller (1992) contends that even if a New Testament scene is implausible, "no one can deny its possibility" (17). In a note, he adds, "The issue is relevant in regards to miracles. Since judgments about their possibility are cosmological and not historical, they force biblical scholars to moonlight as philosophers of science, with predictably messy results (though we seem as untroubled by it as do philosophers and theologians who cite biblical texts uncritically). We have much to learn from the philosophy of science and the philosophy of religion on the cosmological and theological issues entailed in judgments about the possibility of miracles. One problem, which cannot be cavalierly dismissed, is that the cosmological assumptions routinely made in our guild are beholden in part to an obsolete nineteenth-century worldview" (17n33). See also R. Stewart, "Introduction" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 3. Stump (1989) similarly comments that "philosophers and historians need to talk to each other (philosophers and historians and literary theorists, we might add), and that these groups have a great deal to learn from each other" (371).

God's existence, I do not believe I am qualified to adjudicate on the historicity of the event. I must punt to the philosopher.

Habermas: My training and work have been in the fields of biblical historiography and the philosophy of religion. Since adjudicating on Jesus' resurrection requires training in both, I am qualified to render a judgment pertaining to the historicity of the event. Consequently, only those with formal training and work in both disciplines may adjudicate on the historicity of Jesus' resurrection and those who are only biblical scholars should henceforth be silent on the matter. Moreover, since miracles and exorcisms play such a vital role in Jesus' ministry, historical Jesus scholars without training and work in philosophy are likewise henceforth barred from their work.

We may also add that historians do not need direct access to the explanatory entities in their hypotheses. As Craig argues, physicists posit numerous entities to which scientists have no direct access such as quarks and strings. However, "they postulate such unobservable entities on the basis of the evidence that we have as the best explanation."¹⁰⁷ This is tantamount to the move made by historians who argue that "God raised Jesus."¹⁰⁸ Indeed, historians do not have direct access to *any* of the objects of their study, since the past is forever gone.¹⁰⁹ Historians only have remnants from the past and they infer past entities and events on the basis of the evidence that has come to them.

The theological objection only disputes the *cause* of Jesus' revivification or the nature of a revived body, rather than the event itself. In concept, historians could agree that sometime after his violent death, Jesus somehow returned to life and leave a question mark pertaining to the cause of this occurrence.¹¹⁰ Ted Peters argues that what is meant by the term "resurrection" is more than the revivification of a corpse.

¹⁰⁷ Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 24. See also Lorenz (1994), 312; Tucker (2004), 4; Wright (2003), 15-16; Zammito (2005), 178, cf. 177.

¹⁰⁸ Polkinghorne (2006) states that as a theoretical physicist he believes that protons and neutrons consist of subatomic particles (i.e., quarks and gluons) although these never have been and probably never will be seen. He asserts that he believes in the occurrences of the Big Bang and biological evolution even though he was not there to witness either. He believes because of phenomena consistent with these being true (116-17). He believes Jesus' resurrection for the same reason: the extant historical data is most consistent with Jesus' resurrection (118).

¹⁰⁹ Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 9. See also Dunn (2003): "In one sense, of course, we are simply recognizing the nature of the evidence which any biographer has to weigh who has no access to any writings of the biography's subject. That is to say, a portrayal of Jesus as seen through the eyes and heard through the ears of his first disciples is neither an illegitimate nor an impossible task, and such a portrayal, carefully drawn in terms of the evidence available, should not be dismissed or disparaged as inadmissible" (131).

¹¹⁰ Habermas (2003) writes, "The original charge that miracles cannot be investigated in terms of normal research methods would obtain only if we knew that such events did not occur at all, or if they happened only in some nonobjective realm. In either case, it would constitute a proper assessment to denying investigation by historical methodology. However, since it is an open question whether miracles occur in normal history, it would seem to be at least possible to investigate *the historical portion* of these claims with regard to their accuracy" (4); cf. G. Habermas, "The Resurrection of Jesus and Recent Agnosticism" in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007), 288. Craig (*Assessing*, 1989) writes, "According to the above methodology, the historian *qua* historian could conclude that the best explanation of the facts is that 'Jesus rose from the dead;' but he could not conclude, 'God raised Jesus from the dead'" (419).

There is an eschatological component that cannot be verified via historical method.¹¹¹ Jesus' resurrection was believed to have been the first fruits of the general resurrection that will occur on the last day when God will make everything right, redeem the righteous and condemn the wicked. Accordingly, the interpretive construct placed by the early Christians pertaining to what they thought had happened to Jesus has a strong presence. Peters is correct when he contends that full historical verification of what happened to Jesus after his death cannot be obtained until the Parousia. In a similar manner, a historical investigation may lead to the conclusion that Jesus died by crucifixion. However, it cannot conclude that Jesus' death atones for sins to the satisfaction of God.¹¹²

A historian may postulate that God resurrected Jesus, build a case for it that includes theistic evidence, and then demonstrate that the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus occurred in a context in which we might expect a God to act. However, it may be too much to argue that Jesus had a "resurrection" body as understood by first-century Christians with all of the theological implications that accompany that term. Segal may be correct in asserting that there is insufficient historical evidence to conclude that "Jesus was actually and physically raised from the dead and that he appeared in his transformed fleshly body."¹¹³ However, if we nuance this statement by adding four words, I see no reason why the historian in theory is blocked from saying, "Jesus was actually and physically raised from the dead and he appeared in *what others interpreted as* his transformed fleshly body."¹¹⁴

If the evidence for a miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus occurs in a context that is charged with religious significance, it would not appear out of place and the resurrection hypothesis could be the strongest explanation for the data. Meier's position at best militates against historians identifying the cause of Jesus' return to life or the actual nature of Jesus' revived body, but it cannot prohibit historians from voting on the event itself. Lüdemann writes, "Indeed, the miraculous or revelatory aspect of Jesus cannot be the object of any scientific approach. However, as long as theology is 'paired' with historical thought (as it is on the one hand by the character of its central sources and on the other by modern criteria of truth), then it must be interested in a natural explanation of the miracle—or it must admit that even on historical grounds a supernatural explanation is more plausible."¹¹⁵ In summary, I am defining *miracle as an event in history for which natural explanations are inadequate*. I am contending that we may identify a miracle when the event (1) is extremely unlikely to have occurred, given the circumstances and/or natural law and (2) occurs in an environment or context charged with religious significance. If these criteria are

¹¹¹ T. Peters, "The Future of the Resurrection" in Stewart, ed. (2006), 149-69. See also Eddy and Boyd (2007), 88-89; Moltmann in D'Costa, ed. (1996), 80.

¹¹² R. J. Miller in Scott, ed. (2008), 15; Schmidt (1984), 78.

¹¹³ Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

¹¹⁴ If I am correct, Schmidt (1984) punts prematurely when writing, "The events which the gospel messages recount in connection with the Resurrection cannot be brought within our horizon of empirical confirmation and historic understanding. . . . One has a strong impression that the only thing that would fall under the authority of historical investigation is the presence of the Resurrection doctrine in the kerygma of the original Church. About the 'facts' one must question whether they—be they unhistorical, trans-historical, or meta-historical—simply fall out of our reach (and thereby become, as facts, irrelevant)" (78).

¹¹⁵ Lüdemann (2004), 21. See also Craffert (2003), 347.

fulfilled and the Resurrection hypothesis is the best explanation of the historical bedrock, the historian is warranted in affirming that a miracle has occurred.

2.5. Bart D. Ehrman

After acknowledging that some reject the possibility of miracles altogether, Bart Ehrman continues,

There still remains, though, a huge, I'd even say insurmountable, problem when discussing Jesus' miracles. Even if miracles *are* possible, there is no way for the historian who sticks strictly to the canons of historical evidence to *show* that they have ever happened. . . . I'm saying that even if they did, the historian cannot demonstrate it.¹¹⁶

Ehrman offers five arguments in support of his conclusion.¹¹⁷ He first argues that the sources reporting Jesus' resurrection are poor. Historians look for desirable witnesses that include eyewitness accounts, multiple independent accounts, consistent and corroborative accounts, and unbiased or disinterested accounts. Ehrman contends that the New Testament Gospels are not good witnesses since they are not written by eyewitnesses, are written 35-65 years after Jesus, and contain propagandistic stories that were altered during their transmission, which accounts for the irreconcilable differences among them. Ehrman adds that Jesus does not appear in "any non-canonical pagan source until 80 years after his death. So clearly he didn't make a big impact on the pagan world." Regarding discrepancies, Ehrman offers a few examples, such as the day and time of Jesus' death. The Gospel of John reports that it was at noon on the day before the Passover meal was eaten, whereas Mark's Gospel says it was at 9 am after the Passover meal was eaten. Did Jesus carry his cross the entire way as John states or did Simon of Cyrene carry it part of the way as in the Synoptics? Did Mary go to the tomb alone or were other women with her? What did they see when they got there: a man (Mark), two men (Luke), or an angel (Matthew)?

¹¹⁶ Ehrman (2008), 241.

¹¹⁷ On March 28, 2006, Ehrman debated Christian philosopher William Lane Craig at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts. The question both scholars agreed to debate was "Is there historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus?" A complete transcript of the debate is posted online at <http://www.holycross.edu/departments/crec/website/resurrection-debate-transcript.pdf>. The transcript is 38 pages long. I also debated Ehrman on the same issues on February 28, 2008 at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. Since a transcript of that debate is not available at the time of this paper, I will refer to Ehrman's use of the arguments elsewhere. Of Ehrman's five arguments, three are also found in Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 240-44 and two in Ehrman (2000), 166-67; 177-79. Segal offers five arguments of his own, three of which are similar to Ehrman's, one is similar to one offered by Wedderburn (following), and one is unique. See Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 121-38. His unique argument is that Jesus' resurrection cannot be confirmed historically because it cannot be scientifically verified (135). I have answered this contention in chapter 1.2.5 and 1.2.12. See also Marsden (1997), 28-29. Although historical hypotheses vary in the certainties warranted them, it is rare for *any* to be verified scientifically. This is especially true as historians attempt to peek further into the past. It is also noteworthy that Segal takes a fideistic approach to religious matters. He writes that faith "does not depend on rational argument. If it did, it would be reason, not faith" (137). Marxsen (1990) agrees, "But I have tried to show that Jesus' resurrection is a pseudo-subject. It cannot provide any security for faith . . . Quite apart from this, it must also be said that a faith which has somehow been made secure is no longer faith" (91). I am not a fideist and few scholars are interested in a fideistic approach to faith. If my faith can be decisively disconfirmed, let it be done that I may abandon it and be on my way either to another faith or some sort of enlightened atheism.

Did the women tell the disciples (Matthew, Luke, John) or remain silent (Mark)? He adds that there are also non-canonical Christian sources that report Jesus' resurrection in a manner that disagrees with the canonical Gospels. In summary, Ehrman says the Gospels are neither contemporary, nor disinterested, nor consistent.¹¹⁸

Ehrman's second argument is that historians attempt to establish what probably occurred and a miracle by definition is the least probable explanation. "We can't really know the past because the past is done with. We think we know the past in some instances because we have such good evidence for what happened in the past, but in other cases we don't know, and in some cases we just have to throw up our hands in despair. . . . Historians try to establish levels of probability of what happened in the past. Some things are absolutely certain, some are probable, some are possible, some are 'maybe,' some are 'probably not.'"¹¹⁹ Since miracle violates the course of nature, "their probability is infinitesimally remote."¹²⁰ In fact, any natural explanation, no matter how improbable, is more plausible than a miracle, which is by definition the most implausible explanation.¹²¹ "Historians can only establish what probably happened in the past, and by definition a miracle is the least probable occurrence. And so, by the very nature of the canons of historical research, we can't claim historically that a miracle probably happened. By definition, it probably didn't."¹²² This means that any "facts" presented in a case for the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus are "completely irrelevant." Therefore, the resurrection cannot be the subject of historical investigation and must be accepted on faith.

Ehrman's third argument is that the hypothesis that Jesus was raised is theological rather than historical. To say "Jesus was raised" implies that God did it. Historians "cannot presuppose belief or disbelief in God." Such discussions are theological rather than historical and, thus, outside of the discipline of the historian. This is similar to Meier's argument above.

Ehrman's fourth argument is that if we accept that Jesus did miracles we must also be willing "in principle" to concede that other people did them.¹²³ He provides as examples Muhammad, Apollonius of Tyana, Honi the Circle-Drawer, Hanina ben Dosa, and the Roman Emperor Vespasian.¹²⁴ We reject them because they do not agree with our particular religious or philosophical beliefs.

¹¹⁸ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 10-11. Tucker (2005) agrees that the sources for miracle claims provide evidence that is insufficient for establishing the historicity of the miracle. He notes that it is often impossible to establish the independence of multiple witnesses (382), that descriptions of miracles in the Old and New Testaments do not claim to have been witnessed by multiple people (383), and that naturalistic hypotheses should be preferred since they enjoy equal simplicity, yet have "wider scopes," "are more fruitful," and "usually increase further the likelihood of the evidence" (385).

¹¹⁹ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 9.

¹²⁰ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12.

¹²¹ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 13. Goulder in D'Costa, ed. (1996) opines that "even if speculative, a natural explanation is to be preferred" (52). Dawes (1998) speaks of a "world in which miracles are (at best) an explanation of last resort" (35).

¹²² Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12. See also Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 243-44.

¹²³ Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 242. See also Craffert (1989), 342; Lindars (1986), 91; Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

¹²⁴ Ehrman (*The New Testament*, 2008), 242. See also Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006) who provides as examples "the miraculous giving of the Quran to Muhammad" and six-day creation (136).

Ehrman's fifth and final argument is that the canons of historical research do not allow historians to adjudicate on miracle claims:

I wish we could establish miracles, but we can't. It's no one's fault. It's simply that the canons [sic] of historical research do not allow for the possibility of establishing as probable the least probable of all occurrences.¹²⁵

[T]he theory behind the canons in historical research is that people of every persuasion can look at the evidence and draw the same conclusions.¹²⁶

In summary, Ehrman argues that the best sources about Jesus are poor, that historians must choose the most probable explanation and miracle, by definition, is always the least probable, that the statement "God raised Jesus" is theological and cannot be touched by historians, that if we admit the miracles of Jesus we must be open to the possibility of others performing miracles, and that the canons of historical research do not allow such an investigation by historians.

2.5.1. In my opinion, Ehrman is misguided on all five counts. Are the sources poor from which we mine data that serve as evidence for the resurrection hypothesis? We will examine these sources in more detail in the chapter that follows. For now I will note that Ehrman's objection does not establish the conclusion he thinks. At best it demonstrates that terribly deficient sources may prohibit an accurate determination pertaining to a specific past event, including Jesus' resurrection. But it does not rule out historians investigating a miracle claim. We will devote attention to Ehrman's objection pertaining to the quality of the sources when we assess the Resurrection hypothesis.¹²⁷

2.5.2. Ehrman's second argument is that miracle hypotheses are by definition the least probable of all hypotheses. Since historians must choose the most probable explanation, they are never warranted in selecting a miracle hypothesis. Why must a miracle hypothesis necessarily be the least probable explanation? If God exists and wants to act, then the action or result under investigation may actually be the most probable explanation.¹²⁸

Craig answers that the only way to assess a miracle hypothesis as the least probable explanation as Ehrman does is by employing Bayes' Theorem. However, one cannot do this because the background knowledge required is unavailable. As a result, calculating the probability of a particular miracle such as the resurrection of Jesus is

¹²⁵ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 12. The misspelling of "canons" is likely the result of the transcriber of the debate rather than Ehrman.

¹²⁶ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 25.

¹²⁷ See chapter 5.7.2.4.

¹²⁸ Tucker (2005) asserts "if we interpret miracle hypotheses as claiming merely that a divinity performed, or delegated the power to perform, a particular wonder-ful feat of strength . . . [then the] prior probability of such a miracle hypothesis is certainly higher than zero. The likelihood of the evidence for a feat-of-strength miracle, given such a miracle hypothesis, can be quite high" (380). If Tucker is correct, Fergusson (1985) is not when he writes, "On inductive grounds the resurrection of a dead person is intrinsically highly improbable, and therefore it can never be rational to postulate such an event as the explanation of a phenomenon which although remarkable is not so improbable as the resurrection" (297).

inscrutable.¹²⁹ Therefore, he contends that Ehrman is not justified in declaring the “improbability” of the resurrection of Jesus.

Craig admits that if the hypothesis is that Jesus was raised *naturally* from the dead, Ehrman is correct regarding a super-low probability. However, the hypothesis is that Jesus was raised *supernaturally* (i.e., by God) from the dead. If God desired to raise Jesus, then his resurrection may be regarded as very probable. Thus, in order to demonstrate that the resurrection hypothesis is improbable, Ehrman has to provide the necessary background knowledge that God’s existence is improbable or, that if God exists, it is improbable that he would want to raise Jesus.¹³⁰ Craig notes that not only does Ehrman fail to do this, his own philosophy of history prohibits him from doing so. If he is correct that historians cannot say anything about God, they are also restrained from assigning an intrinsic probability to the resurrection of Jesus. Said another way, if historians cannot investigate the claim “God raised Jesus from the dead,” because “God” as the cause makes it a theological rather than historical matter, they likewise cannot say that it is improbable that miracles occur, since such work of God is likewise a matter for theologians and philosophers.¹³¹ Accordingly, Ehrman’s third argument—discussed next—cuts the legs off his second. He fails to justify his definition of miracle, no *a priori* reason exists for assuming miracle is the least probable explanation,¹³² and the probability of the resurrection of Jesus is inscrutable.¹³³

2.5.3. Ehrman’s third argument is that the hypothesis that Jesus was raised is theological rather than historical. To say “Jesus was raised” implies that God did it. Since God is outside the investigative tools of historians, the question of the resurrection of Jesus is a matter for theologians and philosophers rather than historians. I have already addressed this objection with Meier.¹³⁴ However, it may be added that Ehrman confuses historical conclusions with their theological implications. Most would admit that if Jesus rose from the dead, God is probably the best candidate for the cause.¹³⁵ Thus, for Ehrman, since God is a subject for theologians rather than historians, the entire exercise of investigating the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection is illegitimate. But this is to do history backward. Historians should approach the data neither presupposing nor *a priori* excluding the possibility of God’s acting in raising Jesus, then form and weigh hypotheses for the best explanation. Probability ought to be determined in this manner rather than by forming a definition of ‘miracle’ that excludes the serious consideration of a hypothesis prior to an examination of the data.

¹²⁹ Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 32. See also Bartholomew (2000), 112; Plantinga (2000), 276. Tucker (2005) argues that calculating the probability that a miracle hypothesis is true “requires more evidence than is usually available” and that “it is unclear if and how this can be worked out in practice” (381; cf. 382).

¹³⁰ As noted in chapter 1.3.3, this is perhaps the most insoluble component of Bayes’ Theorem when attempting to ascertain the probability of the resurrection of Jesus, since God is a free agent and it is difficult to know *a priori* what He may or may not want to do. See also Gilderhus (2007), 30-31.

¹³¹ Craig in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 36.

¹³² Swinburne (2003): “In so far as there is evidence that there is a God, there is evidence that a violation of natural laws is a serious possibility” (31).

¹³³ See chapter 1.3.3.

¹³⁴ See section 2.4.

¹³⁵ Theoretical physicist Polkinghorne (2006) writes, “Whatever we may say about cloudy unpredictability, we surely can’t suppose that it was through a clever exploitation of chaos theory that Jesus was raised from the dead, never to die again. If this happened (as I believe it did), it was a miraculous divine act of great power” (97).

Moreover, historians often must leave the *cause* of an event unanswered. Yet this does not prohibit them from drawing historical conclusions. Historians are certain that Carloman died in AD 771, although they are uncertain whether his brother Charlemagne had him murdered or he died of natural causes. In this case, historians need not hesitate to conclude that Carloman died in AD 771 while leaving a question mark pertaining to the cause of his death. In a similar way, historians could conclude that Jesus rose from the dead without deciding on a cause for the event. They can answer the *what* (i.e., what happened) without answering the *how* (i.e., how it happened) or *why* (i.e., why it happened). It is only the theological implications of the historical conclusion that gives pause.

2.5.4. I offer two responses to Ehrman's fourth argument that if we grant that Jesus performed miracles we must also be willing "in principle" to concede that others did as well. First, in principle, a Christian who believes that Jesus provides the only way to know God might also believe that God acts in the lives of those who practice other religions.¹³⁶

Second, Ehrman fails to recognize that all miracle claims do not possess an equality of supporting evidence. In fact, the examples provided by Ehrman are poorly evidenced. For example, the *Qur'an* does not report that Muhammad performed miracles. Reports of miracles performed by Muhammad do not appear until much later.¹³⁷ As mentioned earlier in our discussion of Hume, Philostratus's biography of Apollonius is beset by numerous problems much worse than what is claimed for the Gospels.¹³⁸

Onias, also known as Honi the Circle-Drawer, is first mentioned in Josephus as one whose prayers for rain were answered. However, the story is fairly tame:

Now there was one, whose name was Onias, a righteous man he was, and beloved of God, who, in a certain drought, had prayed to God to put an end to the intense heat, and whose prayers God had heard, and had sent them rain.¹³⁹

Around three centuries after Josephus, the story is reported in the Jerusalem Talmud with many more details. Honi prays for rain. When it does not come, he draws a circle and stands inside of it promising not to leave his spot until it rained. When only a few drops came, Honi said this is not what he had prayed for. Then it rained violently. But Honi said he had prayed for "rain of good will, blessing, and graciousness." Then it rained in a normal manner.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ See Twelftree (1999), 43.

¹³⁷ It may be added that theists in general and Christians in particular may not feel compelled to reject a supernatural origin of the *Qur'an*. Muhammad himself first believed that he was plagued by demons when the supernatural being approached him with Quranic revelations, an interpretation at home with biblical Christianity. See Ibn Ishaq, A. Guillaume, transl. (2004), 71-73, 106, and cf. 1 Tim. 4:1.

¹³⁸ See section 2.2.4 above. Also noteworthy is that there are twenty-five extant manuscripts for Philostratus's biography of Apollonius. The earliest is from the eleventh century, the next earliest from the twelfth century, and the remaining twenty-three were written in the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries. See Jones, ed. and transl. (2005), 19, 22.

¹³⁹ Jos. *Ant.* 14:22. English translation by William Whiston.

¹⁴⁰ Y. Taanit 3:8-9 66d in Neusner (1987), 226.

Note that Josephus places Honi in the first century BC whereas the Jerusalem Talmud places him in the sixth century BC, five hundred years earlier! The discrepancies in the Gospels cited by Ehrman pale in comparison to what we find in the reports of Honi. Moreover, Josephus' account is approximately 150 years after the purported event, far longer removed from the event it purports to describe than the Evangelists are from the events they are reporting.

Hanina ben Dosa is a first-century AD figure who is likewise mentioned in the Mishnah¹⁴¹ (c. AD 200) and appears in the Talmud (AD 400-600).¹⁴² Thus, the first report on Hanina ben Dosa's miracles as with Honi is about 150 years after the purported events, much later than the 25-45 years we find with the miracles of Jesus reported in Mark's Gospel.

Three sources report two miracles performed by the Roman Emperor Vespasian.¹⁴³ Two of the three sources wrote as close to the event as Mark was to Jesus. However, a plausible naturalistic explanation is readily at hand.¹⁴⁴

Reports of miracle-workers existed in antiquity. Although not as active as Jesus in performing miracles, they are plentiful.¹⁴⁵ Miracle-workers are not unique to antiquity and continue today. When theme, motif, and form are considered, the number of pre-Christian accounts is reduced to only three in which Ehrman's examples are not to be found.¹⁴⁶ We noticed that the miracles reported in Ehrman's examples are either quite late, far more contradictory than what we find in the Gospel narratives, or have a plausible naturalistic explanation. Former atheist Flew does not believe that Jesus rose from the dead. Even so, he asserts, "The evidence for the resurrection is better than for claimed miracles in any other religion. It's outstandingly different in quality and quantity, I think, from the evidence offered for the occurrence of most other supposedly miraculous events."¹⁴⁷ My objective here is not to argue that the Gospels are reliable sources or that a miracle hypothesis is more plausible than a naturalistic theory posited for the miracle reports of Jesus. Instead, I have demonstrated that historians who regard the miracles of Jesus as historical need not necessarily acknowledge the historicity of the miracles Ehrman cites from other religions. Miracle reports should be examined on a case by case basis.¹⁴⁸ If it turns out that there are good reasons for holding to the historicity of the miracles of Jesus

¹⁴¹ TB Berarkhot 34b; 61b; Yevamot 21b; TB Sotah 9:15; TB Baba Batra 74b; TB Ta'anit 24; 25a.

¹⁴² Neusner (2005), 53. C. A.D. 400 for Jerusalem Talmud and by A.D. 600 for Babylonian Talmud.

¹⁴³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.81 (writes +35 years after the purported event), Suetonius, *Vespasian* 7.2 (+35), Dio Cassius 65.8.1 (+110 or more).

¹⁴⁴ Meier (1994) writes, "Suetonius and Tacitus seem to tell the whole story with a twinkle in their eye and smiles on their lips, an attitude probably shared by Vespasian. The whole event looks like a 1st-century equivalent of a 'photo opportunity' staged by Vespasian's P.R. team to give the new emperor divine legitimacy—courtesy of god Serapion, who supposedly commanded the two men to go to Vespasian. Again, both in content in form, we are far from the miracle traditions of the Four Gospels—to say nothing of the overall pattern of Jesus' ministry into which his miracles fit" (625).

¹⁴⁵ According to Twelftree (1999), individual ancient miracle-workers within 200 years of Jesus on either side did not perform many miracles (247).

¹⁴⁶ Blackburn, "Miracle Working ΘΕΙΟΙ ΑΝΔΡΕΣ in Hellenism (and Hellenistic Judaism)" in Wenham and Blomberg, eds. (1986), 200. See also Blackburn (1991).

¹⁴⁷ Flew in Flew and Habermas (2004), 209.

¹⁴⁸ Crossley (2005), 181.

and that these are lacking in Ehrman's examples, there is no reason why granting the historicity of Jesus' miracles requires historians to grant the historicity of others.¹⁴⁹

2.5.5. In his fifth argument, Ehrman claims that the canons of historical research do not allow historians to investigate miracles. Where are these canons of history to which he refers? In the previous chapter we observed that there are no methods for understanding and doing history that are broadly accepted by professional historians. Instead, historians remain polarized on hermeneutical and methodological considerations.¹⁵⁰ A few statements by professional historians outside the community of religious scholars are worthy repeating: Fischer asserts that "Specific canons of historical proof are neither widely observed nor generally agreed upon."¹⁵¹ Haskill speaks of "the inherently dispersive character of a discipline that, unlike English and Philosophy, lacks even the possibility of defining a single canon familiar to all practitioners."¹⁵² Grant admits, "It is true that every critic is inclined to make his own rules."¹⁵³

One need only consider the debate over postmodernism to realize that there are no specific canons of history that are accepted by nearly all historians. Indeed, if we followed Ehrman's assertion regarding the canons of historical research, historians themselves could not proceed, since leading postmodernist historians such as Ankersmit, White, and Jenkins deny the ability of historians to reconstruct the past in any manner that may be said to be an accurate reflection of the past. Moreover, scholars disagree among themselves whether miracle claims may be investigated. McCullagh's canons of historical research prohibit historians from adjudicating on miracle claims while those of Tucker allow it.¹⁵⁴ Within the community of biblical scholars, the canons of Meier, Dunn, Wedderburn, Theissen, Winter, and Carnley prohibit historians from adjudicating on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus while the canons of Wright, Lüdemann, Brown, O'Collins, Habermas, and Craig allow it. Historians need not be theists to reject Ehrman's canons. Lüdemann is an atheist. What Ehrman would be correct in saying is that there are some historians who disallow the investigation of miracle claims within *their* canons of history.

Ehrman adds that the canons of historical research require that "people of every persuasion can look at the evidence and draw the same conclusions."¹⁵⁵ While a consensus exhibiting this degree of heterogeneity is on every historian's "wish list," it is very rare, as we observed in the previous chapter.¹⁵⁶ Instead a pluralism of preferred hypotheses by historians is typical.¹⁵⁷ Thus, if consensus among historians is to be required before awarding historicity to a particular hypothesis, much of what is regarded as known history would have to be discarded.

¹⁴⁹ That the early Christians borrowed from a dying and rising god motif is now widely rejected. See Mettinger (2001), 7. Also see chapter 5, note 255 below.

¹⁵⁰ See chapter 1.2.11.

¹⁵¹ Fischer (1970), 62.

¹⁵² Haskill (1990), 153.

¹⁵³ Grant (1977), 201. For biblical scholars, see chapter 1, note 256.

¹⁵⁴ McCullagh (1984), 28; Tucker (2005), 373-90.

¹⁵⁵ Ehrman in Craig and Ehrman (2006), 25. See also Henaut (1986), 188; Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

¹⁵⁶ See chapter 1.2.4.

¹⁵⁷ Lorenz (1994), 326.

Segal and Tucker offer similar solutions to this dilemma. Segal mentions Crossan by name and Tucker appeals to biblical criticism along the lines of what is offered by Crossan, namely, that “these stories should be read as metaphors or as fabrications in the service of the political or other interests of their authors.”¹⁵⁸ Segal adds, “A historical theory should be available to assent or dissent regardless of one’s religious perspective. And that is a truer and more accurate statement of the consensus.”¹⁵⁹ These attempts by Segal and Tucker quickly fail. Not only is the consensus sought by Segal contrary to where he wants to go, the biblical criticism to which Tucker appeals is largely biased against the supernatural. Crossan has thus far failed to receive widespread support from scholars who have specialized in the resurrection—including those who deny its historicity—and there are numerous problems with his hypothesis and similar ones that regard the resurrection narratives as metaphor written in the interest of legitimizing authority of church leaders. We will discuss these in detail in chapters four and five. What Segal and Tucker suggest is a position that is itself suspect of unrecognized bias.

We may return then to our previous discussion of what sort of consensus historians should seek. Since we have already discussed this at length in the previous chapter I will only summarize our conclusions.¹⁶⁰ The optimal group from which we will seek consensus consists of members of significant heterogeneity, all of whom have engaged in significant personal research on the particular topic being investigated. Since horizons will no doubt be a great hindrance to objectivity, we will not expect a consensus on the conclusion by these scholars pertaining to whether Jesus was resurrected. Since (for example) some Muslim scholars deny the Holocaust in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we cannot anticipate that these would acknowledge the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus even if it is the best explanation of the data. In fact, Muslims deny Jesus’ death by crucifixion, a fact granted by nearly a universal consensus of historians.¹⁶¹ Therefore, we will seek a nearly universal consensus on the historical bedrock to be employed by hypotheses. This will allow us to proceed without being hindered by those who unquestionably are guided by their horizons more than historical method.

2.6. A. J. M. Wedderburn/James D. G. Dunn

In his 1999 book *Beyond Resurrection*, Wedderburn devotes the first three chapters to a discussion on whether it is possible to answer the historical question concerning the resurrection of Jesus. Chapter one discusses whether the question can even be asked. He notes that when events in antiquity are the subject of investigation, the evidence is often fragmentary and the factual is mingled with bits of legend. The result is that it is unlikely that the historian may conclude what is true beyond all doubt on these matters.¹⁶² He then states that since no one actually claimed to have seen the

¹⁵⁸ Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136 and Tucker (2005), 385. Also see Fasolt (2005), 21, 22.

¹⁵⁹ Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006), 136.

¹⁶⁰ See chapter 1.2.4.

¹⁶¹ Habermas in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007) writes, “since when is convincing a person of the opposite persuasion a prerequisite for arguing that one’s view is fairly indicated by the data? Is it not the case that the opposite could also be said with assurance? How likely is it that the argument constructed by a skeptic or agnostic would convince a believer against his/her position? I doubt that either side wants this to be a prerequisite for their rationality” (286)!

¹⁶² Wedderburn (1999), 11.

resurrection-event, statements by those who believed they had seen a resurrected Jesus are interpretations of what occurred at the tomb.

What the first witnesses experienced was not the resurrection-event itself, but an encounter with Jesus, an encounter which they then interpreted as meaning that Jesus was risen, had previously been raised so as to be in a position to encounter them.¹⁶³

James D. G. Dunn distinguishes among event, data, and fact. Historical events belong to the past and cannot be relived or observed directly. Data, such as reports, artifacts, and circumstantial data are what have survived. Data in reports are never raw. When historians encounter descriptions of a subject, they are interacting with data that have been soaked in the horizon of the descriptor. Modern historians interpret these and attempt to reconstruct what occurred. Accordingly, the data have been influenced by the horizons of several people. These interpretations of the data are referred to as “facts.”¹⁶⁴ Dunn asks how we may speak of Jesus’ resurrection as historical. He answers that the empty tomb and the appearances, both of which he grants, cannot be considered data. The real data are the reports one might appeal to in order to arrive at these “facts” of the empty tomb and the appearances. What about the resurrection itself?

The conclusion, ‘Jesus has been raised from the dead’, is further interpretation, an interpretation of interpreted data, an interpretation of the facts. The resurrection of Jesus, in other words, is at best a second order ‘fact’, not a first order ‘fact’—an interpretation of an interpretation.¹⁶⁵

In other words, for the historian to conclude that Jesus was resurrected, she would be making an interpretation of what a few in the first century had interpreted given the data before them.

Wedderburn and Dunn are willing to inquire concerning the cause of the first-level facts: the empty tomb and the beliefs of some that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to them. Wedderburn argues that this inquiry is limited. The explanation that Jesus was actually raised “passes beyond the historian’s competence as a historian to deliver a verdict upon it. He or she may be able to weigh up the

¹⁶³ Wedderburn (1999), 12. Also Marxsen (1970), 138, although his position is quite different regarding the data. Wedderburn and Dunn state that “resurrection” was the interpretation given by those who had a genuine experience of what they perceived was Jesus after his death. They experienced him and believed he had been resurrected according to what they understood resurrection to be. Marxsen (1970) holds that resurrection was the interpretation some assigned to the object of their interpretation: “the finding of faith” (140). “For *the miracle is the birth of faith*. . . . For ‘Jesus is risen’ simply means: today the crucified Jesus is calling us to believe” (128, emphasis in original). However, Marxsen does not believe that the interpretation assigned by the eyewitnesses limits us from making a historical judgment. Instead, he holds that there is not enough evidence available for us to recover what actually occurred.

¹⁶⁴ Dunn (2003), 102-103. Dunn acknowledges R. G. Collingwood’s work *The Idea of History* (133, 176-77, 251-52) as the source of his view. See my discussion in chapter 1.2.9.

¹⁶⁵ Dunn (2003), 877; cf. Marxsen (1970): “in our historical enquiry into the background of our texts, we do not come upon the fact of Jesus’ resurrection; we come upon the faith of the primitive church after Jesus’ death” (141). Bultmann (1985): “The event of Easter as the resurrection of Christ is not a historical event; the only thing that can be comprehended as a historical event is the Easter faith of the first disciples” (39-40).

probabilities of natural, this-worldly explanations.”¹⁶⁶ But the hypothesis “God raised Jesus from the dead” is “imponderable.”¹⁶⁷ We are back to Meier’s objection. According to Wedderburn, this should not encourage historians to raise their hands in surrender and conclude all is hopeless when approaching the historicity of Jesus’ resurrection. For him, although the resurrection may be outside the reach of historical research, historians can approach it through the back door, since an event(s) is needed in order to explain the data.¹⁶⁸

There are further challenges posited by Wedderburn. One must know what is meant by “resurrection” in order to answer the question “Did Jesus in fact rise from the dead?”¹⁶⁹ He maintains that Paul’s interpretation of what happened to Jesus is quite different than what is portrayed in the Gospels. Citing Dunn, “What Luke affirms (Jesus’ resurrection body was flesh and bones), Paul denies (the resurrection body is *not* composed of flesh and blood!)”¹⁷⁰ Wedderburn continues, “Orthodoxy insisted upon the corporeality of the resurrection in a form foreign to Paul’s thought.”¹⁷¹ Because of the perceived discrepancy, Wedderburn arrives at a conclusion of agnosticism when it comes to our ability to make a historical assessment pertaining to the resurrection of Jesus.

And in the case of the traditions of Jesus’ resurrection these methods lead, in my opinion, to a high degree of uncertainty as to exactly what happened, regardless of how the early Christians may have seen it and proclaimed it. The logical conclusion of such an investigation seems therefore to be, apparently, a regrettable and thoroughly unsatisfactory ‘Don’t know’, a historical agnosticism that seems to undermine any profession of faith . . . As far as the resurrection of Jesus itself is concerned, a decisive historical judgment is to my mind epistemologically improper and impossible.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ Wedderburn (1999), 13.

¹⁶⁷ Wedderburn (1999), 14. Contra Lüdemann (2004), 21.

¹⁶⁸ Wedderburn (1999), 14. This is the approach taken by Wright (2003), 686-96, 706-18.

¹⁶⁹ Wedderburn (1999), 22.

¹⁷⁰ Wedderburn (1999), 66; cf. Dunn (1985), 74. Dunn’s statement is surprising given what he would write three years later in his commentary on *Romans 1-8*: “Insofar as it is their mortality which gives sin and, of course, death their hold over his readers, it is the death and resurrection of these same bodies, of the ‘I’ into a new embodiment (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-49), which will at last bring to an end that dimension where sin and death still exercise their sway, when the *posse non peccare* will at last give way to the *non posse peccare*. Of this Christ’s own resurrection from the dead has provided both the pattern and the assurance (cf. 6:7-10)” (445). With Wedderburn and the earlier Dunn on seeing a contradiction between Luke’s “flesh and bone” and Paul’s “flesh and blood” is Barclay in D’Costa, ed. (1996), 24; R. Brown (1973), 87; Crossan’s comments in Halstead (1995), 521; Robinson (1982), 12; Segal (2004), 442.

¹⁷¹ Wedderburn (1999), 111.

¹⁷² Wedderburn (1999), 96-98. Carnley (1987) is stronger, suggesting that when the early Christians spoke of the resurrection of Jesus, the question of meaning is so important that “many contemporary theologians have raised doubts as to whether the category of ‘historical event’ can be appropriately used with respect to the resurrection of Jesus without emasculating it to the point of destroying it” (33). Segal in Stewart, ed. (2006) argues similarly. He agrees with Wright that the “predominant understanding of the New Testament in the first century was that Jesus’ resurrection was bodily” (121). However, he adds that bodily resurrection meant different things to different New Testament writers. This means that the New Testament writers were more interested in a “community of opinion” rather than a settled meaning. Accordingly, we cannot go from the reports of Jesus’ resurrection to a historical conclusion that Jesus rose, having his corpse transformed (122-23).

2.6.1. It can forthrightly be admitted that the data surrounding what happened to Jesus is fragmentary and could possibly be mixed with legend as Wedderburn notes. We may also be reading poetic language or legend at certain points, such as Matthew's report of the raising of some dead saints at Jesus' death (27:51-54)¹⁷³ and the angel(s) at the tomb (Mark 16:5-7; Matt. 28:2-7; Luke 24:4-7; John 20:11-13).¹⁷⁴ While fragmented data and possibly legendary or poetic elements command caution on the part of historians, the question to be asked is whether these challenges prohibit a positive historical judgment. Most of our historical knowledge is fragmented, since both ancient and modern writers tend to report only those details they deemed important. Yet historians are not necessarily left without any legitimate conclusions that can be made. What must be answered is whether there are enough data to justify a positive historical conclusion. If legendary or poetic elements exist, can these be identified? Can a historical core be identified? If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, there are no *a priori* reasons why a historical judgment cannot be made.

Wedderburn and others correctly note that should a historian make a positive judgment for the resurrection of Jesus, it would be a second-order fact, an interpretation of an interpretation of data from an event that cannot be retrieved. However, this is not nearly as sobering as it may at first appear. Jurors hear testimonies from eyewitnesses who have interpreted an event and then the jurors interpret the testimonies for themselves. Thus, we have an interpretation of an interpretation of an irretrievable event. Should we apply this objection of Wedderburn across the board, our legal system would collapse as well.¹⁷⁵

Neither will this line of reasoning work in historical research, since fact and interpretation appear in every text reporting the past.¹⁷⁶ Let us suppose that a historian of the American Civil War read a paper before a group of American Civil War historians pertaining to the victorious army at the battle of Gettysburg on July 31, 1863. In his paper he notes that the battle itself is irretrievable. The surviving data are numerous documents written by soldiers on both sides, secondary testimonies from those who knew them, civilians who saw the battle, and artifacts such as bullets, cannon balls, and the remains of soldiers who were mortally wounded as a result. After our historian considers all the data, he concludes that there was a certain belief of those present at the battle that the Union Army won. That is a first-order fact. However, that is as far as historians may go. The conclusion of modern historians that the Union Army won is a second-order fact, since it is an interpretation of an interpretation of data from an irretrievable event. Therefore, the historian is not

¹⁷³ We will comment extensively on this passage in chapter 5.5.2.4.

¹⁷⁴ That angels are part of a poetical genre is not so strongly supported. However, R. Brown (1993) argues they are "describing God's visible presence among men" (260; see also 129, 156). Quintilian provides a list of devices for praising gods and men in Greco-Roman writings (*Institutio Oratoria* 3.7.10-18), although angels are not included in the list. Josephus reports that he employed beautiful narrative, a harmony of words, and adornment of speech in his writing of history in order to provide a reading experience that is both gracious and pleasurable, although he was careful to omit no facts and to conform to the standards expected of historians in his day (*Ant.* 14:1-3). See also Ecclesiastes 12:10.

¹⁷⁵ See chapter 1.2.10.

¹⁷⁶ Even atheist New Testament critic Lüdemann (2004) maintains this is a poor objection to adjudicating on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus (21).

warranted in concluding that the Union Army was victorious. Once the shock of his assertion had worn off, our historian would be laughed out of the room.¹⁷⁷

Historians simply do not practice writing history in this manner. They proceed by inference, often working with second-order facts, such as Augustus's death on August 19th, AD 14, and the burning of Rome during Nero's reign in AD 64. Why is the argument advanced by Wedderburn and others appealing when applied to Jesus' resurrection, yet scornful when applied to another historical event, such as the battle at Gettysburg? One could only be certain after hearing them on the matter. Perhaps that it is because the former is an event in antiquity whereas the later is much more recent. But this would shift the objection away from second-order facts and toward a time factor. In other words, this objection asks how far in the past the event occurred. Perhaps the hesitancy stems from the suggestion that a miracle was involved. This is a good reason for being much more careful and reserved before arriving at a historical judgment. But that is all it warrants. It does not support the position that no historical judgment is possible when that judgment involves second-order facts.¹⁷⁸ Neither is it an argument specifically directed against miraculous events.¹⁷⁹

2.6.2. Wedderburn offers one final objection to the resurrection hypothesis as the subject of historical investigation. He correctly claims that in order for one to render a verdict, the historian must have an understanding of what is meant by the term "resurrection." Otherwise, the claim becomes incoherent and no verdict can be made. Wedderburn then claims that we cannot be certain what the first-century authors meant by the term. Quoting Dunn, he claims that the earliest writer on the subject, Paul, presents a different picture of resurrection than do the Evangelists and

¹⁷⁷ Baxter (1999) provides another illustration. Against the assertion "At most you may put, 'The Twelve made an inductive inference and/or interpretation, that they were consciously encountering Jesus'" (24), he provides the following counterexample: "'That evening Gilbert inferred/interpreted that he consciously met Sullivan; but he got it wrong (in the dark, after drinks at his club)—Sullivan was not there.' So then, both those two, contrasting statements about Gilbert are surely meaningful for you. And surely you can envisage proceeding as a historian to evaluate which, as a hypothesis, elucidates the data better; which is true. In principle, you could come down in favour of either. Surely you would reckon perverse any contrary suggestion: that a priori you are debarred from accepting a statement, 'Gilbert consciously encountered Sullivan', and may not go beyond, 'Gilbert inferred/interpreted that he consciously encountered Sullivan'" (25).

¹⁷⁸ O'Collins (1973) has a related objection to making a historical judgment regarding the resurrection of Jesus. He argues that because the raised Jesus could pass through walls (Luke 24:35-37), was "glorious" (Phil. 3:21) and "pneumatic" (1 Cor. 15:43ff.), it cannot be regarded as an "inner-historical event." "Since the New Testament asserts such a transit to an existence outside normal historical conditions, it seems that either to affirm or to deny the truth of this alleged resurrection is not *as such* to make an historical judgment" (60). Thus, O'Collins concludes that the resurrection of Jesus should be removed from any category of events that are open to historical investigation (62). While historians are certainly unable to affirm the essence of Jesus' resurrection body, this by no means necessitates the conclusion that they cannot determine whether he was seen alive after his death, if the evidence is sufficient.

¹⁷⁹ Postmodernist Barrera (2001) argues that this type of argument against an adjudication on the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus offered by Wedderburn and Dunn actually supports a postmodernist view of history: "The use of sources complicates this way of talking, because historians cannot narrate what they saw or what they remember, but only interpret how others beheld it, creating different discourses in order to fashion their own discourse about a referent invisible by definition. In this way, ontological security is snatched from professional historians: their work is just one instance of rational conversation among individuals and groups. This insight might force them to give up, perhaps, that disdain with which those who 'make history' treat those 'metahistorians' dedicated only to talking about how history is written" (201).

Orthodoxy. While Paul seems familiar with an ethereal and spiritual Jesus, the Evangelists know of one who is both corporeal and material, one who can eat and be touched with human hands.¹⁸⁰

This argument does not have the force Wedderburn imagines. Let us suppose for the moment that Wedderburn is correct and that Paul opposes a corporeal resurrection of Jesus while the Evangelists and Orthodoxy promote it. Historians usually prefer earlier reports. I will argue below that it is very probable that Paul's beliefs pertaining to Jesus' resurrection were similar to Jesus' original disciples.¹⁸¹ So, his view of resurrection should be preferred over those of the Evangelists and Orthodoxy. It is only if Paul stands alone as an early source against the Evangelists and other relatively early Christian literature that the waters muddy. But I will also argue below that Paul's view of resurrection involved the corpse: bodily resurrection.¹⁸² Accordingly, Wedderburn and early Dunn are mistaken in their interpretation of Paul.¹⁸³ If I am correct, Wedderburn's final argument completely fails.

2.7. A Turning Point for Historians

In the past, a significant number of historians have tended to reject the miraculous as part of the past. In this chapter we have observed that there are no sound reasons, *a priori* or *a posteriori*, for prohibiting historians from investigating a miracle-claim. It is noteworthy that the climate is changing and professional historians are warming up to the notion of miracles. In the 2006 Theme Issue of *History and Theory*, which focused on "Religion and History," David Gary Shaw opened with the following words:

Another claim . . . is that history works *against* religion, as its other and opposite, but that this is not as it should be. The opposition is an artifact of modernity. Indeed, throughout these papers the theme develops that modernity is the obstacle or prejudice that stands not just between historians and the people of the past, but also between historians and many religious people today. . . . We appear to be at a moment when we need new intellectual and professional approaches to deal with religion. Accounting for our own position is tricky, but always worthwhile, if only to try to appreciate our prejudices and assumptions in advance of doing our scholarship. . . . this Theme Issue shows historians and others concerned with the study of religion to be at a sort of confessional watershed, a moment of collective acknowledgment that the interaction between religion and history is not at the position that most historians have thought, especially when we fall back only upon our own learned memories, graduate training, prejudices, or our grand narratives of historical development. The Issue's papers pulse with a sense that religion has turned out in a variety of ways to be more important and a more clearly permanent factor in history than our paradigms had supposed. The consequences of this include a need to reassess the historian's attitudes toward religious phenomena and religion's trajectory within the mass of forces we call historical. . . . The methods that historians used may need revision or

¹⁸⁰ See also Fredriksen (1999), 261-62.

¹⁸¹ See chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

¹⁸² See chapter 4.3.3.9.

¹⁸³ See chapter 4.3.3.9 and chapter 3.2.3.4.d.

defense if they are to cope productively with believers past and present, even if we can disregard what historians themselves believe.¹⁸⁴

A number of contributors in the same issue addressed the negative attitude many historians presently hold toward miracles, and questioned the assumptions of modernity.¹⁸⁵ Cladis asserted that “secularization theories that suggest religious traditions are anomalies in modernity have not, in fact, provided adequate accounts of the modern world as we find it.”¹⁸⁶ Several of the contributors noted a metaphysical bias held by many historians against miracle claims. Gregory identified what he understands as an unrecognized secular bias within the community of professional historians:

Among many academics . . . the belief that miracles are impossible in principle seems natural, normal, obvious, undeniable—rather like religious beliefs in close-knit, traditional societies. The conviction has an aura of neutrality and objectivity, as if dogmatic metaphysical naturalism were somehow not as much a personal conviction as is dogmatic religion, as if rejection of the very possibility of transcendent reality were the default position, one obvious to any intelligent person.¹⁸⁷

He goes on to refer to this approach as a “secular bias” that “assume[s] metaphysical naturalism or epistemological skepticism about religious claims” and that this “yields a secular confessional history. This goes unrecognized to the extent that such metaphysical beliefs are widely but wrongly considered to be undeniable truths.”¹⁸⁸ Gregory ends with the admonishment that “critical self-awareness should lead us to acknowledge this fact and to move beyond secular confessional history in the study of religion.”¹⁸⁹

Biblical scholar Ben Witherington echoes these thoughts:

Even some contemporary Bible scholars assume that miracles must be left out of account if we are going to do ‘scholarly’ work like the ‘other critical historians.’ This is a carryover from the anti-supernatural bias of many Enlightenment historians, but it seems a very odd presupposition today. Our

¹⁸⁴ Shaw (2006), 1, 3-4. See also in the same Theme Issue, Butler (2006), 53; Cladis (2006), 93, 94, 96.

¹⁸⁵ See especially Shaw (2006), 4; Butler (2006), 53; Cladis (2006), 94.

¹⁸⁶ Cladis (2006), 96.

¹⁸⁷ Gregory (2006), 138.

¹⁸⁸ Gregory (2006), 146. A number of biblical scholars have made similar observations: Davis (1993): “The real question is whether our modern beliefs and practices somehow commit us to naturalism or near naturalism. Again, I am unable to see why they should do so” (39); Marsden (1997): “most academics are united in taking a purely naturalistic worldview as their starting point. Not surprisingly, this naturalistic starting point leads them to purely naturalistic conclusions” (30); R. J. Miller (1992): “One problem, which cannot be cavalierly dismissed, is that the cosmological assumptions routinely made in our guild are beholden in part to an obsolete nineteenth-century worldview” (17n33); Pannenberg in D’Costa, ed. (1996): “Christian theologians who work in the field of biblical exegesis should challenge the spirit of historical positivism. As theologians they participate in a contest for a more appropriate understanding of reality” (71); Stewart in Stewart, ed. (2006) notes a skepticism about the resurrection of Jesus due to “methodological presuppositions founded upon enlightenment thinking” (3).

¹⁸⁹ Gregory (2006), 149.

postmodern world is experiencing a newfound openness to miracles, magic, the supernatural, the spiritual, or whatever you want to call it.¹⁹⁰

If our assessments throughout this chapter are correct, historians are within their professional rights to give attention to miracle claims. Moreover, there are signs from the community of professional historians that the epistemological Ice Age of anti-supernaturalism appears to be coming to an end. Given this warming attitude toward miracles, those scholars who claim their rights to investigate miracle claims will find themselves in the company of a growing number of colleagues.

2.8. Burden of Proof in Relation to Miracle Claims

Before concluding, we must address a final concern: Do historical claims involving miracles require a greater burden of proof? It may be helpful to assess a few paradigms and choose from among them. We will look at three: Risk Assessment, the Legal System, and Sagan's Saw.

2.8.1. Risk Assessment

One may read a report that ABC stock is poised to quadruple in its value over the next month and invest \$100 without requiring much evidence. However, it would be wise to conduct a significant amount of additional research in order to assess the company's strength and the probability of its success before reallocating one's entire savings to ABC stock. Principle: When the stakes are higher, we require greater supporting evidence.

Although the principle is pragmatic, probabilities are not determined by our personal interests in a matter. The probability that ABC stock will quadruple is the same whether one is investing \$100 or \$30,000. We are simply less cautious about being mistaken when the potentially negative consequences are minimal.

Pragmatism does not necessarily assist us in ascertaining truth. In this context it is similar to Pascal's Wager, which suggests that, if there is a 50 percent probability that Christianity is true one is wise to embrace it, since one has everything to gain and nothing to lose. But one choosing not to believe has nothing to gain and everything to lose. The Wager is a practical tool for getting people to take seriously the need to commit to choosing the worldview rather than treating the question as of mere academic interest. But it does not assist us in knowing whether Christianity is true.

The stakes may be high when it comes to certain religious claims and for that reason we do well to take our investigation seriously, not cutting corners by failing to work hard at managing our horizon, skimming too quickly through literature that is in conflict with our cherished views, and dismissing hypotheses too quickly that are in conflict with our own. But we reiterate that this is for practical reasons, since cheating in this regard may only hurt ourselves and others. The risk assessment paradigm is not a good model for ascertaining truth.

¹⁹⁰ Witherington (2006), 5.

2.8.2. Legal System

In the American and British legal systems, a greater burden of proof is required in criminal cases than in civil cases. In civil cases, verdicts are to be rendered based on the preponderance of evidence, that is, what is *more probable than not*, whereas in criminal cases, a guilty verdict should be rendered only when guilt has been established *beyond a reasonable doubt*. The burden is heavier in a criminal case because the life and liberty of the defendant is at stake. In other words, the stakes are higher in a criminal case and, thus, a greater burden of proof is required before action against the defendant may be taken, since it is a vile thing to convict the innocent.¹⁹¹

If we are to draw from the legal profession, we must choose whether we will adopt the burden of proof required in civil or criminal cases. Most historians proceed along the lines of civil law where the burden of proof is *more probable than not*.¹⁹² One could argue, however, that a greater burden of proof is required for miracle claims like the resurrection of Jesus, since they may call for a change of worldviews, perhaps a change of ethical systems, and may even have ramifications pertaining to the eternal destiny of one's soul. Therefore, the much higher standard of *beyond a reasonable doubt* must be met.

There are difficulties with this application of the legal paradigm's criminal option. While the higher standard of *beyond a reasonable doubt* is required, it is likewise true that in criminal cases the defendant—for instance, the Resurrection hypothesis—is presumed innocent. This is methodical credulity rather than neutrality. In this case, the Resurrection hypothesis would be presumed innocent and it would be its falsehood that must be demonstrated *beyond a reasonable doubt* before rejection! But we have already provided reasons for rejecting this approach.¹⁹³ Moreover, placing the higher burden of proof on the Resurrection hypothesis would grossly misappropriate how burden of proof is actually employed in the legal system. The hypothesis (or defendant) is presumed guilty or false (i.e., methodical skepticism) and its truth must be demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt before it may be accepted. This would be the equivalent of presuming the guilt of the defendant since his innocence may result in inconveniences for the jurists.¹⁹⁴ If the legal paradigm is to be employed, the burden of proof in civil cases—*more probable than not*—is our only option.

2.8.3. Sagan's Saw

Astronomer Carl Sagan was fond of saying that “extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.” It seems intuitively obvious that when a claim is

¹⁹¹ According to Carmy (2008), “In general, the bar of evidence in blood cases [in Talmudic law] is extraordinarily, almost impossibly high, permitting disqualification for minor discrepancies. Judges who have handed down a capital verdict in the face of these restrictions are required to fast. The death penalty requires more than a simple majority but less than a supermajority. This is explicitly justified as a bias in favor of leniency” (45).

¹⁹² See chapter 1.3.4, especially n335.

¹⁹³ See chapter 1.2.10.

¹⁹⁴ Further reasons for rejecting *methodical skepticism* are provided in chapter 1.2.10.

extraordinary, the historian must find something additional to support it before granting it historicity.¹⁹⁵

Landing on the moon in July 1969 was an extraordinary event. It was extremely difficult and had never occurred previously. Yet most people believed the reports when they watched astronauts walking on the moon on their televisions, a medium that often distorts truths and presents untruths, legends, and fictions. The moon events were extraordinary. The reports were believed because they were thought to be credible and the authorial intent to communicate the event as it occurred was known. In neither case was extraordinary evidence required.

Let us suppose that my wife returns from the grocery store and tells me that she saw and spoke with our next-door neighbor while there. Although it is possible she is mistaken, because I know her to be an intelligent and credible witness I have every reason to believe her report without hesitation. Now let us suppose that when she returns from the grocery store, she tells me instead that she saw and spoke with the President of the United States. I may think this far out of the ordinary. However, if after questioning her further I can have confidence that she is not joking, or put another way, if I am confident that I understand her authorial intent as being truthful, I would accept her report—and drive to the grocery store with the hopes of having a similar experience, provided that I like the incumbent President. Her claim that she spoke with the President of the United States in the grocery store is extraordinary in a sense whereas her claim that she spoke with our next-door neighbor is not. The former may give me pause. Yet, I am satisfied because of my confidence that the source is credible and that its authorial intent is to describe an actual event accurately. I would not require extraordinary evidence or even evidence in addition to her report before believing that she spoke with the President of the United States in the grocery store. Instead, I am interested in the credibility of the report and the authorial intent.

Now let us suppose that my wife returns from the grocery store and tells me she saw and spoke with an alien. In this instance, I have a serious tension between the evidence, which may be good, and my understanding of reality. Should I reject the evidence or adjust my understanding of reality? Let us also suppose that my neighbor then telephones and provides a report similar to my wife's. I then turn on the television and observe a number of reports of alien sightings presently taking place around the world. If I am satisfied that the sources are credible and I am secure in my understanding of authorial intent, I may still pause, since I presently regard the existence of aliens as dubious. But I should then reexamine my reasons for believing in the nonexistence of aliens in light of the evidence before me that they do. Perhaps I would be less hasty to reject all of the reports of alien sightings. I should not require *extraordinary* evidence but *additional* evidence that addresses my present

¹⁹⁵ Beaudoin (2006): "To the extent that deviant miracles must be assumed rare, reports of such events must be looked on with a commensurate degree of suspicion, and so a considerably strong testimony will be needed before we can justly accept such a report. But this is nothing other than what common sense dictates" (123). Henaut (1986) argues that our "present-day knowledge [of reality?] shifts the burden of evidence to the one who alleges the miracle to be true. The defender, in effect, must produce a far stronger rebuttal to set aside the usual warrants and backings" (179). Viney (1989) agrees with Hume that the more unlikely an occurrence is, the greater the preponderance of evidence is required (127). He adds that "we recognize that miracle claims carry a heavier burden of proof than claims for events that fall within the realm of antecedent probability" (127). When the heavier burden cannot be met and no hypothesis adequately accounts for all the facts, as is the case with the resurrection of Jesus, then one should suspend belief (128).

understanding of reality or my horizon, which may be handicapped and in need of revision.

This is similar to answering the objections of a Muslim to Jesus' resurrection or even his death by crucifixion. Since the *Qur'an* states that Jesus was not killed in the first century (Q 4:157-58), the very strong evidence that he was may not be enough to convince a Muslim. This would not mean that extraordinary evidence is required before historians are warranted in concluding that Jesus died by crucifixion in the first century. It only means that a Muslim may require additional evidence for himself before believing, since there is a conflict with his horizon. The worldview of one historian does not place a greater burden on the shoulders of others. It is the responsibility of the historian to consider what the evidence would look like if he were not wearing his metaphysical bias like a pair of sunglasses that shade the world. It is not the responsibility of the evidence to shine so brightly that they render such glasses ineffectual.

If the evidence for the occurrence of a particular miracle is strong, that is, the historian can establish that the authorial intent of the sources is to report what was perceived as a miracle, the event occurred in a context that was charged with religious significance, the report possesses traits that favor the historicity of the event, and no plausible naturalistic theories exist, then a requirement for extraordinary evidence is unwarranted. Some historians may require additional evidence supporting supernaturalism before believing since the event is foreign to their present horizon, but no greater burden of proof is required for a miracle-claim.¹⁹⁶ There is a difference

¹⁹⁶ Additional evidence supporting supernaturalism could include the evidence for theism. However, I am not in agreement with the following who contend that a case for theism is required of historians proposing the historicity of a particular miracle: Swinburne (2003), 203; Davis (1993), 186; Geivett in Stewart, ed. (2006), 96, 100, 101. Let us suppose that I am mistaken on the above and that the maxim remains that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. We are challenged to define when the evidence may be said to be 'extraordinary.' This, of course, is a subjective endeavor, since what is extraordinary for one may not be enough for another. I would like to suggest that, given the paucity of data that often plagues many historical hypotheses, when a hypothesis fulfills all five criteria for the best explanation and outdistances competing hypotheses by a significant margin that hypothesis may be said to have extraordinary evidence supporting it. I would also like to call attention to the fact that the requirement for extraordinary evidence cuts both ways. If a historian proposes a natural theory such as group hallucinations in order to account for the reports of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus to groups, he will be required to present a case for the possibility of group hallucinations. Since modern psychology generally regards group hallucinations as highly improbable if not impossible, the assertion that group hallucinations account for the post-resurrection appearances is an extraordinary claim and, thus, requires extraordinary evidence. Non-theist historians are not licensed to claim that a hypothesis that is terribly *ad hoc* or that strains the data beyond what it can bear should be preferred over a hypothesis with a supernatural element that meets every claim to historicity. And those who feel compelled to do so indirectly admit the strength of the data in favor of a miracle. The non-theist historian may reply that miracles are more unlikely than very rare natural occurrences and, thus, require a greater burden of proof than an unlikely natural hypothesis that accounts for the same data. Accordingly, any hypothesis involving a natural explanation, no matter how improbable or poorly evidenced should be preferred over a hypothesis involving a miracle. (See Pannenberg's observation of this logic throughout biblical scholarship in Pannenberg in D'Costa, ed. [1996], 63.) But how does the non-theist historian know this? Testimonies of God's intervention in history occur with every claim to answered prayer. Although many claims of God's intervention could in reality be coincidence, many claims of coincidence could in reality be God's intervention. This is not to suggest that historians should assign a supernatural explanation when a natural one is available that is at least equally plausible. I am instead challenging the notion that the historian's default position is that we live in a world where God does not intervene.

between demonstrating the historical superiority of a hypothesis and convincing a particular historian to give up a deeply held view.

We have examined three paradigms for determining burden of proof. The first is a risk assessment matrix where higher risk warrants a greater burden of proof. But this directly links risks with ramifications. Probabilities do not work in this manner. The legal paradigm only works when the burden of proof in civil cases is applied: *more likely than not*. This is how historians typically proceed. The third paradigm is Sagan's Saw: *extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence*. But this fails since only additional evidence is required and that by certain historians for whom the conclusion challenges their horizon. We observed that the evidence is not responsible for satisfying the biases of the historian. Rather, the historian is responsible for setting aside his biases and considering the evidence. We are thus left with the conclusion that the paradigm provided by the legal system in civil court is best suited for the investigation of miracle claims.

2.9. Summary and Conclusions

Throughout this chapter we have sought to answer the question, "Can historians embark on historical investigations when the subject is a miracle-claim?" We have considered five major positions. We first considered Hume's objections. His arguments challenged us to form criteria for the identification of a miracle and to be able to do so without opening the floodgates of credulity. We next dialogued with McCullagh who reminded us of the challenge posed by horizon discussed in the previous chapter. Historians embarking on a historical investigation of the resurrection of Jesus must be prepared to defend their worldview. We then analyzed Meier's position, which reinforced the challenge to have criteria for identifying a miracle. Meier also prompted us to place a check on how far historians can go in their examination of miracle claims, since a description of "resurrection" carries more than the claim that a corpse was revived; it is theologically charged to the extent that some of its components cannot be verified.

We then read Ehrman who made us consider probabilities and reminded us that the criteria and method we employ must likewise be applicable to miracle claims in non-Christian religions. Finally, our interaction with Ehrman reminded us that historians are prone neither to give much attention to epistemology nor to justifying their methods. Thus, as we proceed we will be careful to understand where we are going and how we are going to proceed. Wedderburn and Dunn reminded us that facts are laden with interpretation and that some facts are built upon a combination of other facts. Finally, we discussed how the burden of proof is impacted by historians arguing for the historicity of a particular miracle-claim and discovered that no greater burden is required.

Each of these challenges has made us consider our steps more carefully and sharpened our thinking every step of the way. We may not agree with those who maintain that historians cannot assess miracle claims for their historicity; but we are thankful for their contribution and are better historians as a result.

Therefore, we conclude that historians are not prohibited from investigating the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus, although historians affirming its historicity

cannot grant *resurrection* in its full theological sense. If the resurrection of Jesus was an event that occurred in history, those who refuse historians the right to investigate it or who *a priori* exclude miracles as a possible answer could actually be placing themselves in a position where they cannot appraise history accurately. Ben Meyer explains:

He accordingly finds himself in a situation which does not allow him, as historian, to come to grips with history, for he cannot know whether or not the possibility he dutifully omits to consider offers the best account of a given constellation of data.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ Meyer (1979), 102. See also R. Brown (*Death of the Messiah*, 1994), 2:1468; Habermas in Geisler and Meister, eds. (2007), 290-91; Padgett (1998), 294-95. Contra is Schweitzer (1964) who maintained that a “hate” for the supernatural elements of the Gospels, “sharpened [the] historical insight” of Reimarus and Strauss (4).