

Questions about *Of Miracles*

1. 'It will be sufficient to observe that our assurance in any argument of this kind [*viz.* from testimony] is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses.' (*Enquiry* §88) Is Hume right about this? Do we really need to have inductive evidence for the proposition that people usually tell the truth before it is reasonable for us to believe what we are told? If not, what bearing does this have on Hume's argument about miracles?
2. What does Hume mean by 'proof' and 'probability', as used in this section? (Relevant background for this question is *Treatise* I.iii.xi–I.iii.xii). What does he mean when he speaks of 'opposite' proofs (§90)?
3. 'A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature.' (§90) What does Hume mean by 'laws of nature'? Does Hume think it is *possible* for miracles to occur [or to be observed], or does his very definition of 'miracle' rule out the possibility of miracles occurring [or being observed to occur]?
4. What is the distinction between the "miraculous" and the "marvelous" which Hume draws in §§89–90? How does Hume use this distinction in his discussion of the case of the Indian prince? Is Hume right that events like the raising of the dead, the restoration of missing limbs, etc. are 'miraculous' by his own definition rather than really marvelous—is there really any important difference between our relation to such events and the Indian prince's relation to the freezing of water?
5. What is Hume's official conclusion in Part I of the section? Is this conclusion true? If so, is it a trivial truth or an interesting, substantive one? If it is a trivial truth, why is Hume interested in it?
6. What is Hume arguing for in Part II of the section, and how successful are his arguments?
7. Hume draws a contrast between two imagined cases of testimony for miracles: the universal darkness, and the resurrection of Queen Elizabeth. Is Hume right that in the former case it would be reasonable to believe the testimony, and in the latter case unreasonable? How does he explain the difference? Is his explanation correct?
8. What is Hume's ostensible point in §§100–101? Is he to be taken seriously?