



God, Nature, and the Concept of Miracle

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Abstract

This dissertation is an attempt to defend and develop the implications of the view that miracles are events brought about by God which are physically impossible and which possess some religious significance. By "physically impossible" I mean an event contrary to the natural dispositions of things in the world. Such a view constitutes a return to the classical Thomistic conception of miracle. It is motivated by the failure of the standard modern or contemporary view of miracle to stand up to logical, epistemological and theological criticism. ;In the first chapter I attempt to show that a concept of physical impossibility based on either the regularity or the necessitarian view of laws fails. In the second chapter I show that there is coherent conception of physical impossibility in terms of theory of providence which makes God the sole cause of natural events. I reject this concept of miracle since there are good reasons to reject this theory of providence. In the third chapter I set forth a theory of providence which allows genuine causal power to things. On this basis I develop a view of laws of nature and of physical impossibility which meets the difficulties set forth in the first chapter. The fourth chapter is an examination of three attempts to define miracle solely in terms of religious significance, apart from physical impossibility. I argue that these attempts go astray because they do not allow a strong enough sense of God's responsibility for a miracle. Therefore physical impossibility is a necessary condition for the miraculous. However, religious significance is also a necessary condition for an event to be a miracle. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I consider epistemological objections to the definition of miracle I have presented

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