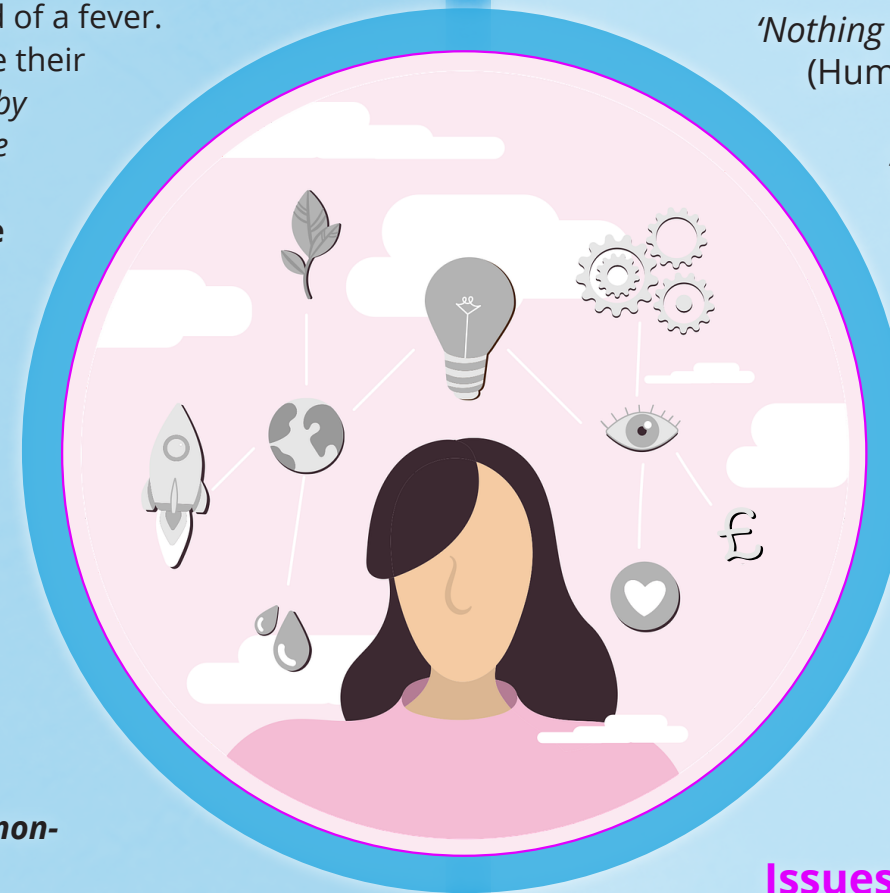


Key concepts

- St. Aquinas wrote that miracles are: *'done by divine power apart from the order generally followed in things.'*
- In this definition, the cause of the event is God, and the event is beyond the normal observable pattern of nature.
- The potential for miracles is within nature and is created by God. It is only contrary to human knowledge of nature.
- There are three ranks of miracle. Something done by God that nature:
 - cannot do alone e.g. the sun reversing its course in the sky
 - can do, but not in that order e.g. living after death
 - can do but is done without the working of nature e.g. being cured of a fever.
- David Hume took a **sceptical** approach, defining miracles to dispute their existence. He defined miracles as: *'A transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent.'*
- In this definition, the cause of the event is God, and a **law of nature** is broken e.g. someone being raised from the dead.
- R.F. Holland defined **contingency miracles** as *'a contradiction in experience'* or an *'event that in certain circumstances has a human significance'*.
- In this definition, there is no need for the suspension of any laws of nature, or divine intervention.
- Miracles are impressive and unusual **coincidences**, bringing about religious conviction e.g. child on a train track, for whom a train manages to stop, causing the mother to consider God as having intervened.
- Richard Swinburne's definition of miracles was *'A violation of a law of nature by a god, that is, a very powerful rational being who is not a material object (viz., is invisible and intangible).'*
- In this definition, a violation of a law of nature is *'an occurrence of a non-repeatable counter-instance to a law of nature'* e.g. levitation.
- A law of nature cannot account for the event, and if the law were adjusted to describe it, it would be an unsuccessful prediction in any other circumstance.
- A miracle requires deeper **significance** than just breaking natural laws.
- Some religious believers accept that miracles occur
- Some sacred writings report miracles. If these writings are believed to be **divinely inspired**, they are therefore considered true e.g:
 - Exodus 14: the parting of the red sea for Moses and the Israelites.
 - The **revelation** of the Qur'an to Muhammad.
- Miracles may be perceived to confirm existing beliefs. If God is personal, powerful, and loving, He may sometimes intervene in the world.
- Statements of faith may sometimes appear to be confirmed by miracles e.g. Jesus' identity is confirmed by the virgin birth and Jesus' resurrection.
- Some miracles are considered to confirm God's message e.g. A sign that God cares for His people or the divinely appointed status of a prophet.



- Some believers accept miracles because they claim personal experience.
- Contact with the divine is more important than nature being violated e.g.
 - Seventy miracles of healing have been recorded at Lourdes.
 - The Ganesha deity drinking milk at a temple in New Delhi.

Key quotes

'A miracle is... that which has a divine cause, not that whose cause a human person fails to understand.' (Aquinas)

'Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happen in the common course of nature.' (Hume)

'If a god intervened in the natural order to make a feather land here rather than there for no deep ultimate purpose.... These events would not naturally be described as miracles.' (Swinburne)

Key words

sceptical	law of nature	contingency miracles
coincidences	violation	nonrepeatable counter-instance
significance	revelation	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some argue that there is no agreed upon definition of miracle and therefore the word is meaningless.

Others point out that a clearer understanding of the nature of a law of nature is needed for an accurate definition of miracle.

Others point out that the meaning of an event is more important than whether it breaks an actual physical law.

Key questions

Is it reasonable for a religious person to believe in a God who will cure one person and allow another to suffer?

Does it matter if a miracle breaks a law of nature or not?

Is a coincidence significant enough to be called a miracle?