Analyzing the Philosophies of Hume and Hobbes

Hume and Miracles

To accurately comprehend Hume's conceptualization and opinion of the 'miracle,' one must revolve their analysis around his central philosophical identity as an empiricist. His belief that experience is the basis of epistemological truth is foundational to this understanding. This does not mean that Hume equates any and all experience to truthful understanding of something, but rather he is quite cynical of what constitutes a valid argument for what can be epistemologically true to us.

Miracles, to Hume, are innately impractical in actuality. Though there exists a philosophical debate as to what a miracle semantically signifies and if we have the knowledge to discern miracles from novel natural law, he finds that there would have to be a proven violation of the laws of nature. A professor writing for the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy assumes Hobbes refers to an "extensive and exceptionless" event (Corner 1). Moving on from these philosophical fields, however, there are majorly two epistemological mechanisms from which the veracity of a miracle can derive: direct experience or hearsay from a different eyewitness. Regardless, both of these sources comprise essential flaws that lead Hume to his conclusion that miracles are impossible if not improbable. In regards to direct experience, the aggregate experiences of someone would tend to prove a lack of miracle-resembling occurrences expectedly due to adherence to what we see as natural processes. Basically, natural processes show patterns of happenings following a certain normal order — miracle-like events are minimal in comparison to the overwhelming natural monotony experienced, thus we must deem the scarce miracle-resembling event as a mistake in our own perception and understanding and/or understand the weight of evidence mounted against its presence. In addition, to amount a 'freak accident' to an error on one's personal behalf and not attribute it to a greater force is epistemologically comprehensible. This makes the presence of miracles at the very least far-fetched. In terms of eyewitness accounts, there exists a need for trust that cannot involve verification without evidence. With innate bias, psychological phenomena and illness, imperfection between the human memory and communication, etc. it leaves too many holes for hearsay to be a sustainable reason to trust the veracity of miracles. Not to mention, Hume brings up conflict between religious factions — as seen through the promotion of one's own godly miracle and outward rejection of another's — as evidence that the definitions of an authentic miracle is combated between holy lines. Though it is seemingly all we may rely on to epistemologically understand miracles, the lack of a priori argument makes it incredibly unreliable to Hume. Therefore, he begs the question, can we — an innately flawed people — truly trust others and especially ourselves to prove that miracles occur?

Those who object to Hume's philosophy on miracles cite many lines of reasoning, but the argument that is arguably the most foundational and complex is that of taking a primary viewpoint antithetical to Hume's: a rationalist perspective. If one removes the necessity of experiential evidence to generally prove something, what remains is a rationalist, intuitive and reasonable need. A philosophy professor published an article bringing up the idea that if one believes in a god, then that figure may bend the rules of nature as they please, thus creating a miracle. If someone may believe that miraculously, godly things are possible, then miracles must be as well. As Rockwood puts it, "the mere fact that such-and-such is a law does not give us any reason to believe that God did not in fact violate that law on a given occasion" (Rockwood 564). I defer to the concept of difference: just because something is out of the ordinary or new does not mean that it holds no value or must be shunned.

However, the bottom line, to Hume, is whether or not the credibility of miracles' existence stands to be more convincing than the doubt. To this stout empiricist, the doubt is overwhelming and any rationalist or religious argument against it is quasi-void. Though Hume is known for notorious empiricism especially with this argument, he believes that intuitive reason is innate within his argument, appealing to the rationalist mindset. It is for all of this that Hume stays cynical: in terms of what we should make of miracles, it matters not if a god, neighbor, nor quasi-phantom figure utters or attempts to prove a miracle, because personal, unscathed, essentially scientific experience is what epistemologically brings light to the truth.

Hobbes and Sovereign Power

Continuing with cynical gazes at central philosophies, Hobbes introduces basics to moral and political philosophy through an elaborate quasi-blueprint involving the escape from natural unease through a shared covenant and act of giving to be made whole in society by a sovereign healing figure.

Hobbes's central argument is that people must submit entirely to a sovereign power in order to live a peaceful and functional life to its fullest extent. His reasoning as to why is laid out in *Leviathan*, but involves a hefty and verbose list of nineteen laws of nature. These laws differ from less stringent guidelines or liberties as there is an obligation/necessary component with a slight permanence sprinkled in. The rationale for the gravity of such laws derives from Hobbes's unsurprisingly-cynical view on the human race's ontology of being unsociable and hostile. The state of nature he describes is one deeply-rooted in people's striking similarity to one another that causes constant conflict. (Any differences in physicalities or intangible inner characteristics are minute to Hobbes as the general whole is composed of identicalness.) With the same basic goals and reasons to fight i.e. competition, safety, and reputation, he finds that a war-like state is omnipresent in nature; it is a primal and untouched place. He

urges looking through an empirical lens to see just how savage the human race is. Left to its natural state, the human race is also war-torn and anarchic — lacking a gauge of what justice or injustice resemble and what is morally right or wrong — due to no common sovereign power providing a peaceful resolve.

It is here where Hobbes brings in what he views as the only solution to this moral/political imperative. I defer to what was brought up in the first sentence of this section: he pushes the need for a seemingly all-mighty authority figure, which Hobbes often alludes to as being an "author" of sorts. This sovereign is perfectly fit for such a job as they can represent and account for the similar needs and wants of the people in what will be a civil society. Without this central power, the natural war-state continues through confrontation and perpetuated through desire for such conflict. The sovereign, however, comes with rules separate from those laid out for the rest of society. This authoritarian/monarch must be given access to seemingly all authority otherwise the system will be imperfect and basically unfunctional if true peace is desired — which it is by each person in the laws of nature. The transition from the chaotic state of nature to peaceful rule is instigated by the relinquishing of rights to both the general community and the sovereign for a utilitarian approach to the path to civil society. This social contract that Hobbes describes is built on the forfeiting/transferring of rights, explained heavily in his laws of nature, leaving an uncertainty yet trust to others that a reformed society buttressed by this mutual relinquishment will be formed. It is treating others as oneself would care to be treated and acting as you wish others to act that sits at the core of the social contract. His concept that we are voraciously egotistical yet reasonable in decision-making makes him believe that we would be rightfully quick to submit to a sovereign power, in conjunction with following the social contract, to escape the ill-suited state of nature. A professor writing for the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy eloquently almost simplifies Hobbes's theory that "we are essentially very complicated organic machines, responding to the stimuli of the world mechanistically and in accordance with universal laws of human nature" (Friend 1). It is with the help of essential coding by the sovereign "author" that we find it possible to not only agree to a social contract but to follow through with the rules as justice/injustice and right versus wrong are defined and enforced.

Hobbes's reasoning for sovereign power is connected to his theories of the social contract and state of nature through a flowing-like recipe. The primordial state stands in the state of nature, a place defined by its warlike chaos and understood by Hobbes's interdisciplinary idea of human psychology/sociology and how our ubiquitously shared desire for the same basic needs causes quasi-entropy. He proposes that while this complex state seems to be default, it can be remedied by absolute sovereign power, only which can be done by everyone in the society adhering to the social contract i.e. relinquishing certain rights for the betterment of the whole community. The laws of nature Hobbes describes are carried within and between these concepts, guiding their formation around their stringent,

necessary principles. The interconnectedness of Hobbes's complex argument for sovereignty bolsters his claim.

Works Cited

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