

**A DISSERTATION ON MIRACLES:  
CONTAINING AN EXAMINATION  
OF THE PRINCIPLES ADVANCED  
BY DAVID HUME IN AN ESSAY  
ON MIRACLES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649563296

A Dissertation on Miracles: Containing an Examination of the Principles Advanced by David Hume in an Essay on Miracles by George Campbell

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**GEORGE CAMPBELL**

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**DISSERTATION ON MIRACLES:**

CONTAINING

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PRINCIPLES ADVANCED BY

DAVID HUME, ESQ.,

IN

**AN ESSAY ON MIRACLES;**

WITH A CORRESPONDENCE ON THE SUBJECT BY MR. HUME,  
DR. CAMPBELL, AND DR. BLAIR.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

**SERMONS AND TRACTS.**

**BY GEORGE CAMPBELL, D.D.,**

PRINCIPAL OF THE MARISCHAL COLLEGE, AND ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF ABERDEEN;  
AUTHOR OF THE TRANSLATION OF THE FOUR GOSPELS, &c.

The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me.—JOHN 1. 25.

**A New Edition.**

**LONDON:**

PRINTED FOR THOMAS TEGG, 73, CHEAPSIDE;  
R. GRIFFIN AND CO., GLASGOW; TEGG AND CO., DUBLIN; AND  
J. AND S. A. TEGG, SYDNEY AND HOBART TOWN.

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## ADVERTISEMENT.

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It is not the only, nor even the chief design of these sheets, to refute the reasoning and objections of Mr. HUME with regard to miracles: the chief design of them is, to set the principal argument for Christianity in its proper light. On a subject that has been so often treated, it is impossible to avoid saying many things which have been said before. It may, however, with reason be affirmed, that there still remains, on this subject, great scope for new observations. Besides, it ought to be remembered, that the evidence of any complex argument depends very much on the order into which the material circumstances are digested, and the manner in which they are displayed.

The *Essay on Miracles* deserves to be considered as one of the most dangerous attacks that have been made on our religion. The danger results not solely from the merit of the piece: it results much more from that of the author. The piece itself, like very other work of Mr. Hume, is ingenious; but its merit is more of the oratorical kind than of the philosophical. The merit of the author, I acknowledge, is great. The many useful volumes he has published of *history*, as well as on *criticism*, *politics*, and *trade*, have justly procured him, with all persons of taste and discernment, the highest reputation as a writer. What pity is it that this reputation should have been sullied by attempts to undermine the foundation both of *natural religion*, and of *revealed*!

For my own part, I think it a piece of justice in me to acknowledge the obligations I owe the author, before I enter on the proposed examination. I have not only been much entertained and instructed by his works; but if I am possessed of any talent in abstract reasoning, I am not a little indebted to what he has written on *Human Nature*, for the improvement of that talent. If, therefore, in this Tract, I have refuted Mr. Hume's *Essay*, the greater share of the merit is perhaps to be ascribed to Mr. Hume himself. The compli-

ment which the Russian monarch, after the famous battle of Poltowa, paid the Swedish generals, when he gave them the honourable appellation of his *masters in the art of war*, I may, with great sincerity, pay my acute and ingenious adversary.

I shall add a few things concerning the occasion and form of the following Dissertation.

Some of the principal topics here discussed were more briefly treated in a *sermon* preached before the *Synod of Aberdeen*, and are now made public at their desire. To the end that an argument of so great importance might be more fully and freely canvassed than it could have been, with propriety, in a sermon, it was judged necessary to new-model the discourse, and to give it that form in which it now appears.

The *edition* of Mr. Hume's *Essays*, to which I always refer in this work, is that printed at *London*, in duodecimo, 1750,\* entitled, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*. I have, since finishing this tract, seen a later *edition*, in which there are a few *variations*. None of them appeared to me so material as to give ground for altering the *quotations* and *references* here used. There is indeed one *alteration*, which candour required that I should mention: I have accordingly mentioned it in a note.†

The *arguments* of the *Essayist* I have endeavoured to refute by *argument*. Mere *declamation* I know no way of refuting but by *analyzing* it; nor do I conceive how *inconsistencies* can be answered otherwise than by *exposing* them. In such *analysis* and *exposition*, which I own, I have attempted without ceremony or reserve, an air of *ridicule* is unavoidable: But this *ridicule*, I am well aware, if founded in *misrepresentation*, will at last rebound upon *myself*. It is possible, that, in some things, I have *mistaken* the author's meaning; I am conscious that I have not, in any thing, designedly *misrepresented* it.

\* As this advertisement was prefixed to the first edition of the Dissertation, I was not a little surprised to observe, that the French translator declared, in the first sentence of his *Avis au Lecteur*, that he did not know what edition of Mr. Hume's *Essays* I had used in this work. On proceeding, I discovered that my *advertisement* has not been translated by him, which makes me suspect, that, by some accident, it had been left out of the copy which he used.

† Page 101.

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## PREFACE.

I HERE offer to the Public a new and improved edition of my Dissertation on Miracles, first printed in the year 1762, together with some other Tracts related to it, as supplying additional evidences of the truth of our religion, displaying its amiable spirit, and manifesting its beneficial tendency, in respect, not only of individuals, but of communities and states.

The first of these is a Sermon on the Spirit of the Gospel, preached before the Synod of Aberdeen in 1771. The second, a Sermon preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge in 1777; the scope of which is to show, that the success of the first publishers of the gospel is a proof of its truth. The third is a Sermon preached at the Assizes at Aberdeen, on the happy Influence of Religion on Civil Society. The fourth also is a Sermon, on the Duty of Allegiance, preached at Aberdeen in 1776, on the Fast-day, on account of the Rebellion in America; and the fifth, an Address to the People of Scotland on the Alarms that had been raised in regard to Popery.

On the Dissertation itself I have made a few amendments, not very material I acknowledge, yet of some use for obviating objections and preventing mistakes. It has been observed by several, that Mr. Hume has, since the Dissertation first appeared in print, once and again republished the Essay to which it was intended as an answer; not only without taking the smallest notice that any thing reasonable, or even specious, had been urged in opposition to his doctrine, but without making any alteration of any consequence on what he had advanced. I know but one exception, if it shall be thought of moment enough to be called an exception, from this remark. What, in former editions, had been thus expressed, as quoted in the Dissertation,\* “ Upon the whole it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle *can* ever

\* Part I., Sect. 1.

*possibly amount* to a probability, much less to a proof," is made in the octavo edition, published in 1767, "Upon the whole it appears, that no testimony for any kind of miracle *has ever amounted* to a probability, much less to a proof." By this more moderate declaration, Mr. Hume avoids the contradiction there was in the sentence to the concession he had subjoined in a note. But no correction is given to many other sentences, which needed correction not less glaringly than this. For this conduct it is not easy to account, unless on the hypothesis, that he had never read the Dissertation, or that he had so low an opinion of it, as not to think it contained any thing which either required an answer, or deserved his notice. What follows will probably satisfy the reader that neither of these suppositions was the fact. That Mr. Hume had read this attempt to confute his argument, and did not think contemptuously of it, I have his own authority to affirm; for, soon after its publication, I was honoured with a letter from him, one great purpose of which was to assign his reasons for not intending a reply. What he writes on this subject shows sufficiently, though incidentally, that contempt was not the passion which the perusal of this tract had raised in his mind. As there is nothing in the letter which can lead to an unfavourable reflection, either on the understanding or on the disposition of the writer, (for to me it appears to have an opposite tendency,) and as it assigns his own reasons for not engaging farther in the controversy, I have been induced, in justice both to him and to myself, to publish it. I say, in justice to him; for I am convinced that Mr. Hume would not have considered it as redounding to his honour, to have the construction above mentioned put upon his silence. Yet it must be owned, that, to those who have never heard himself on the subject, it is by far the most plausible construction. The letter is word for word as follows:—

" SIR,

" It has so seldom happened, that controversies in philosophy, much more in theology, have been carried on without producing a personal quarrel between the parties, that I must regard my present situation as somewhat extraordinary, who