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Hume's 'Of Miracles,' Islam, and Prophetic Revelation

Contemporary Philosophy of Religion has seen philosophers engage significantly with David Hume's influential essay 'Of Miracles' (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section X). The discussion of Hume's essay by these philosophers, primarily Christian (e.g., Richard Swinburne, William Lane Craig, Timothy McGrew, etc.) or atheistic (e.g., J.L. Mackie, Michael Martin, Michael Ruse, etc.), has centered on the force of Hume's argument concerning reports of miracles. There is a noticeable absence of Muslim philosophers in this discussion. In my paper, I argue that allowing this absence to linger is unwise for Muslim philosophers, especially if they are interested in upholding the intellectual respectability of Islamic belief in the public sphere. More specifically, I argue for the following:

- (1) Although Hume's argument is mainly about miracles, which he defines as "a transgression of a law of nature by a particular volition of the Deity, or by the interposition of some invisible agent," the logic of his argument may also be applied to the Islamic notions of prophecy (*nubuwwah*) and revelation (*wahy*). Indeed, Hume himself, in his essay, thinks his argument has broader applicability, noting that it "may be applied, without any variation, to prophecies." As such, Hume's argument is relevant to prophecy and revelation in Islam;
- (2) Once common misinterpretations and misunderstandings of Hume's argument are set aside, the argument has significant force. In his argument, Hume maintains that no report may have such force as to prove a miracle and make it a "just foundation of a system of religion." When scripture and tradition are considered merely as "external evidences," as he puts it, they do not lend themselves to a successful religious apologetic that vindicates the fundamental claims of religion;
- (3) Hume's argument succeeds in showing that attempts in Islamic apologetics seeking to establish the truth of prophecy and revelation (e.g., as in the case of Muhammad being a genuine Prophet who received revelations from God) via scripture and tradition do not work; and,
- (4) Given the success of Hume's argument, Muslim philosophers should rethink the epistemological foundations of prophecy and revelation in Islam, particularly if they think that these foundations rest on public evidence, examinable by all rational persons, vindicating the truth of Islamic belief and practice.



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Imran Aijaz is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Michigan-Dearborn. His research focuses primarily on Analytic Philosophy of Religion and Islamic Philosophy. Across these two areas, he is especially interested in the topics of faith and reason, religious epistemology, religious diversity, and religious pluralism. He also has an interest in Ancient Philosophy and its reception by Jewish, Christian, and Islamic thinkers in the Middle Ages. Aijaz's book, *Islam: A Contemporary Philosophical Investigation* (Routledge, 2018), brings reflection on many of these topics to bear on the Philosophy of Religion. He has also published several essays on these topics in various academic journals and books.