

ON THE RELATION OF DIVINE INTERVENTION AND LAWS OF NATURE

R. B. Bergmann

*Bremen, Germany
R.B.B@t-online.de*

There is a long tradition of arguing that God or other transcendent entities, given such entities exist, would not be able to intervene in the physical world [1]. Although this thinking is often viewed as common sense, one may rightly ask for the justification of this far reaching view which is based on the claim of causal closure. This claim requires that every event is determined by physical processes governed by the laws of nature. If this reasoning was correct, there would be no room for divine intervention of whatever kind. Most obviously, there would be no room for miracles, but also mental interactions like revelations of God in whatever way would be impossible.

This view has had a profound impact on theology. Schleiermacher redefined the term miracle [2] and later Bultmann reinterpreted accounts of the New Testament in accordance with the concept of clausal closure. He concludes that by the knowledge of the powers and laws of nature there is no room left for transcendent intervention and that humans are not open to the influence of spiritual powers [3].

Presently there seems to be a new openness for the consideration of the possibility of miracles. An intuitively helpful description of the relation between divine intervention and the course of nature was earlier on given by C. S. Lewis [4]. Philosophically based arguments have been put forward by various contemporary authors, see e.g. Refs. [5 - 7]. From a physics point of view, it is easy to demonstrate, that laws of nature on their own do not determine physical events. This seemingly simple statement has, however, far reaching consequences for the question of divine intervention [8].

In addition to the discussions mentioned above, there are a huge number of observations indicating that divine intervention has really happened and is still happening, see e.g. [9]. An extensive as well as

systematic study on the occurrence of miracles throughout ancient and recent history in and outside Christianity was presented by Keener [10]. Keener also discusses various explanations and criticism on reports of miracles and concludes: “Many healing claims involve blindness, inability to walk and even raisings from the dead; other claims involve sudden changes in nature after prayer. Despite some debatable instances, some other cases are fairly clearly extraordinary. It seems to me that to dispute that such phenomena have sometimes occurred is not really possible to open minded people.“ [10, p. 599]

In this presentation I argue that causal closure does not follow from physics but rather is a metaphysical principle. I investigate the nature of laws of physics using classical mechanics as a simple example. Considering probabilistic processes present in quantum mechanics or deterministic chaos with respect to divine intervention will elucidate the question, whether divine intervention can be uniquely identified.

[1] L. Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums*. Yazyzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck, Altenmünster (2016). (first published by Otto Wigand, Leipzig 1841)

[2] F. Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*. Reclam, Stuttgart (1969) (first published by Unger, Berlin 1799).

[3] R. Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie*. Ed. H.-W. Bartsch. 4th ed., Herbert Reich, Evangelischer Verlag GmbH, Hamburg (1960).

[4] C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*. William Collins, London. Reissued 2016 (originally published 1947)

[5] A. Plantinga, *Where the conflict really lies – Science, religion and naturalism*. Oxford University Press, Oxford (2011)

[6] R. A. Larmer, *The Legitimacy of Miracle*. Lexington Books, Maryland (2014)

[7] D. von Wachter, *Miracles are not violations of the laws of nature because the laws do not entail regularities*. *Europ. J. Philosophy of Religion* 7, 37-60 (2015)

[8] R. B. Bergmann, *Does Divine Intervention Violate Laws of Nature?* *Organon F* 26, 86 (2019)

[9] E. Metaxas, *Miracles*. New York: Dutton (2015)

[10] C. S. Keener, *Miracles. The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic (2011)