

Book Review:
The Case Against Miracles
Edited by John W. Loftus

Gregory Michna,
Arkansas Tech University

Abstract: *A review of John W. Loftus's edited volume, The Case Against Miracles.*

Keywords: Miracles, Case Against Miracles, John W. Loftus, Darren M. Slade, Michael Shermer, David Corner, Matt McCormick, Edward T. Babinski, Valerie Tarico, R. G. Price, Robert J. Miller, Robert Conner, David Madison, Abby Hafer, Randall Heskett, Clay Farris Naff, Robert M. Price, Evan Fales

IN HIS EXCELLENT RECENT monograph on the politicization of miraculous claims and sensory evidence entitled, *Blood from the Sky: Miracles and Politics in the Early American Republic*, Adam Jortner writes, “This long-term war over religion and the supernatural formed a fundamental piece of the American religious firmament and represented a working out of the ideas of liberty and representative government rarely explored in American historiography.”¹ The war Jortner chronicles was one between *philosophes* and intellectuals of the transatlantic Enlightenment on one side, whose rigorous demand for sensory evidence contributed to a disenchantment that undermined traditional claims about divine activity in the temporal world, and a hodge-podge cast of Latter-Day Saints (i.e. Mormons), Native American revivalists, occultists, religious members of established churches, and others, who marshalled their own miracle claims using the same Enlightenment language regarding sensory evidence. The struggle between those seeking to disprove miracles in favor of a materialist worldview and theists hoping to utilize miracle claims in support of their deity continues today, as evidenced in John W. Loftus’s most recent edited volume, *The Case Against Miracles*.² Loftus envisioned the collection as a response to Lee Strobel’s 2018 book, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates*

¹ Adam Jortner, *Blood from the Sky: Miracles and Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2017), 17.

² John W. Loftus, ed., *The Case Against Miracles* (United Kingdom: Hypatia Press, 2019).



Evidence for the Supernatural.³ However, Loftus’s book eschews the point-by-point response format often employed in theist-atheist debates by offering an anthology of articles critiquing the arguments traditionally utilized by theists.

The overarching thesis binding together the entries in this anthology is apparent from the opening line of Loftus’s introduction in which he writes, “This anthology is about miracles and why there isn’t enough objective evidence to believe in them” (9). Threaded throughout many of the essays is an affinity for Section X: “Of Miracles” in David Hume’s 1748 treatise, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, which defines miracles as “a violation of the laws of nature,” expanded by Loftus into the following definition: “A miracle is a supernaturally caused extraordinary event of the highest kind, one that’s unexplainable and even impossible by means of natural processes alone” (13). Taking this as the conceptual grounding for the volume, Loftus and the assorted contributors who provided essays for *The Case Against Miracles* offer a range of arguments—from the philosophical and intellectual to specific historic deconstructions—suggesting that miracles fly in the face of reason and should be met with credulity.

Loftus has structured the volume with three major divisions amongst the essays. The first section consists of seven essays responding to the apologetic claim that miracles are reasonable to believe. The second section, which outlines aspects of investigating miracle claims in its four essays, concerns itself particularly with the issue of biblical revelation, or prophecy. Finally, the last eight essays that make up section three each address key biblical miracles from the Noahic flood to the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth and Paul’s claims to have seen the risen Christ. The composition of the volume makes sense, beginning with a conceptual foundation for establishing Hume’s epistemic premises and defending his maxim before applying this heuristic to the biblical text and apologetic claims relying on miracles and prophecy. I will now comment on the standout aspects of essays, for better or worse, in each section since it is impractical to provide a detailed review of each essay in a book totaling 560 pages.

One common theme found across all of the essays in the first section concerning apologetic miracle claims by theists is that the authors believe that the burden of proof in the debate lies with theists rather than atheists. Applying Hume’s framework to the subject, David Corner presents a strong chapter in “Miracles and the Challenge of Apologetics,” suggesting that apologetists must first present evidence that a “miraculous event” has occurred,

³ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Miracles: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018).

spelling and grammatical errors and that there are no aberrations in paragraph formatting. Numerous instances of these editorial issues litter the text, and the presentation of the volume as a scholarly work suffers as a result. That is not to say that all of the essays are problematic—many are interesting, well-written, and demonstrate a scholarly approach to footnoting and documenting sources. Others appear amateurish in composition and detract from the overall presentation of the volume.

With this in mind, the reviewer's recommendation is that scholars considering this book should selectively utilize individual essays rather than the book as a whole. General readers will find the book interesting and informative if they identify with the authors' intellectual position while religious readers and persons of faith who participate in theist-atheist debates may find the tone taken by Loftus and a few other essayists to be pejorative or antagonistic. Loftus is admittedly unapologetic for his stance in the introduction as a *caveat emptor*, though it is worth pointing this out to potential readers. Loftus and the other contributors provide a wide survey of issues inherent in miraculous claims that will give any reader much to consider.

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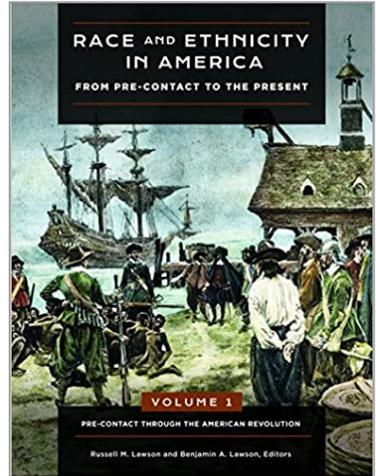
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gregory Michna is an Assistant Professor of History at Arkansas Tech University. His forthcoming article in *Church History* (a part of his book manuscript in preparation) examines the relationship between the Puritan doctrine of preparation and the early missionary project in New England.

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