

2019 Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum Summer Series:
WELCOME! The Last Session of 2019



Gian Lorenzo Bernini, 1615; Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence Italy

2019 Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum Summer Series:
Are You a Robot: Brain, Mind and Soul

Lecture IX:
Miracles: Divine Free Will
What, How, Why

Dan Winske
Los Alamos Faith and Science Forum
July 31, 2019

A Brief Recap of the Summer

- I. June 5: Bob Reinovsky – robots, emergence
 - II. June 12: Chick Keller – consciousness, mind, free will, soul
 - III. June 19: Nels Hoffman – brain, plasticity
 - IV. June 26: Bob Fuselier – emotions, sub-conscious behavior
 - V. July 10: Warren Brown – embodiment and emergence
 - VI. July 11: Warren Brown – embedded and extended
 - VII. July 17: Garrett Kenyon – AI, machine learning
 - VIII. July 24: Gerry Wood – evil, its sources
 - IX. July 31: Dan Winske – miracles → back to the beginning
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Why Study Miracles?

- Humans are spiritual as well as physical beings.
- They experience strong innate feelings of faith, hope, love.
- These qualities (and others) transcend beyond the physical world.
- Science tends to reject spiritual feelings, because they are non-reproducible.
- But evidence for their existence found in earliest humans.
- In spite of much philosophy, theology, science, as well as recent advancements in neuroscience, spiritual feelings and thoughts remain unexplained. In particular, are they “embodied” and “embedded”¹ or do they reside in your “soul”²?
- Miracles reinforce these mysteries.

¹Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, psychology and religion*, Ch. 9.

² “Soul...is the center and deepest point of the whole person. Soul is that point of contact with the Divine...”, Robert Barron, *And Now I See: A Theology of Transformation*, p. 17.

Miracles Lie in the Middle of Science/Religion Division

- Divisions in biblical terms: e.g., Matt. 25:31-32:
 - “When the Son of Man comes in his glory..., he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats...”
- Divisions based on fundamental differences¹:
 - “Science takes things apart to see how they work.” **how**
 - “Religion puts things together to see what they mean.” **why**
- Divisions remain in interpreting miracles:
 - “...science will begin to decipher the operation of some of our most cherished religious experiences, such as “miraculous” conversions or healings. Religious beliefs in general, and Christian faith in particular, must prepare for that day.”²
 - “What comes from God is only seen and grasped when the heart is open and the spirit purged of self. Then it awakes faith. But when these conditions are not present, there are always reasons to be found to say solemnly and impressively that it is all delusion.”³

¹Jonathan Sacks, *The Great Partnership—Science, Religion and the Search for Meaning*, p. 31.

²Malcolm Jeeves & Warren S. Brown, *ibid*, p. 136.

³Mon. Romano Guardini, *Magnificat*, Vol. 21, no. 5, p. 53, 2019.

Classes of Miracles

Miracles come in two flavors:

- Major **M**iracles: e.g., worthy of a major motion picture:
 - Best examples of the conflict between “science” and religion (where “science” → “naturalism”),
 - Re-enforcement of Jonathan Sacks’ axiom: (“The meaning of a system lies outside the system”),
 - Strong affirmation that God is all-powerful, all-loving.
- Minor Miracles: e.g., more like a you-tube video:
 - A more personal affirmation that God is loving, caring at every level.

What is a **Miracle**?

- C. S. Lewis: “A **Miracle** is an interference with nature by a supernatural power”¹
 - Naturalist: Believes nothing exists except Nature → does not believe in a Supernatural Being who can interact with our universe.
 - Thus, by definition, naturalists don’t believe in **Miracles** and they conclude that miracles must be lies, legends or history.
 - Nature left to her own resources would never produce **Miracles** (and can’t provide rational thought or morality). [no emergence, yet]
- Lewis concentrates on Jesus’ **Miracles**:
 - “The Grand **Miracle**” – the Incarnation;
 - “**Miracles** of the old creation” – wine, feeding, healing;
 - “**Miracles** of the new creation” – walking on water, resurrection, ascension.
- “God does not shake **Miracles** at random...they come on great occasions...of that spiritual history which cannot be fully known to man” (p. 174).

¹C. S. Lewis, *Miracles*, p. 10.

Example from New Testament: Marriage Feast at Cana

John 2:1-10:

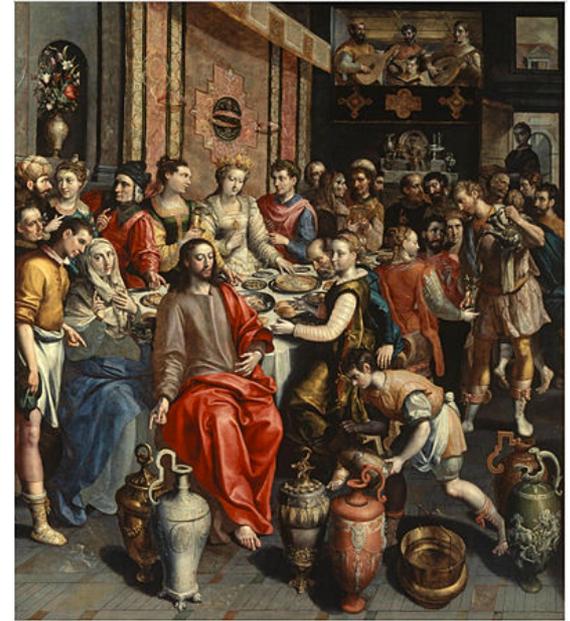
On the third day there was a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding about twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him “Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guest have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

The Wedding at Cana (1563), Paolo Veronese (1528-1588)



A Modern Perspective: “The Content of Our Thoughts Matters, Because **Our Subjective Experience** Is All We Ever Know”¹

- **M**iracle at Cana – changing water into wine
 - Was the molecular structure of water modified to become that of wine?
 - Or did the wedding celebrants have the *subjective experience* of drinking good wine?
 - “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”
 - But this quote is from the wine steward, who was most likely quite sober.



The Marriage at Cana, Marten de Vos, c. 1596

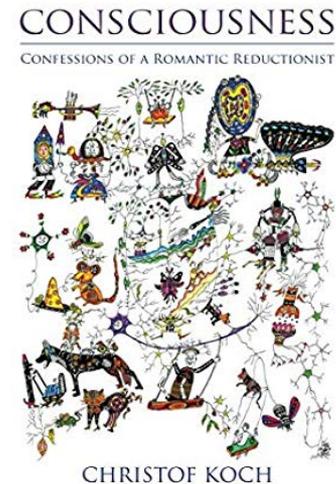
¹Slide from Nels’ presentation, Lecture III)

A Neuroscientist's Explanation¹

“...are **M**iracles compatible with science? The answer is an unambiguous no. Take Jesus' ... turning water in wine at a wedding in Canaan. This runs counter to a fundamental principle of the conservation of mass-energy. The aromatic and ether molecules making up the wine had to come from somewhere. Water molecules can be converted into carbon and other elements and molecules that constitute wine, but this is a feat of nuclear synthesis that requires prodigious amounts of energy. ... It is, therefore, extremely unlikely that the **M**iracle in Canaan took place....The possibility of a Supreme Being turning water into wine is so outlandish that it can be rejected.... **M**iracles are not in the cards.”

¹Christof Koch: *Consciousness – Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist*, pp. 157-158.

Dr. Koch is President & Chief Scientist at Allen Institute for Brain Science in Seattle.



Theologians' Interpretations

- Messianic tradition -- Isaiah 25: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, **a feast of well-aged wines**...he will swallow up death forever...The Lord will wipe away tears from all faces... This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”
- Augustine: “The **Miracle** shows not so much a suspension of the laws of nature but their acceleration and intensification....And the water that Jesus transforms stands for the nature by which grace works and upon which it builds.”
- C. S. Lewis: “Every year, as part of the Natural order, God makes wine... Once, God now incarnate makes wine in a moment... The **Miracle** consists in the short cut, but the event that leads to it is the usual one.” (p. 141)

But: John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (1994): pp. 934-950, notes 199-256, pp. 1010-1026: “But if we asked whether...Jesus actually performed some astonishing deed involving water and/or wine,...considered a **Miracle**, the answer must be negative.”

Joshua Moritz: Old Testament Miracles¹

- Examples:
 - Parting of the Red Sea, drying up of the Jordan River, Elijah calling down fire.
- “Natural” explanations possible
 - Wind & tides, earthquakes, fire tornados (whirls).
- Issue is not how, but when: timing in the key!



¹Joshua M. Moritz, *Science and Religion--Beyond Warfare and Toward Understanding*, Ch. 8.

Modern Miracles

- Medical Miracles (present state of medical knowledge?)
- Survival in accidents (finite probabilities?)
- Eric Metaxas: “Miracles” (contemporary, personal stories)
- Science Miracles:
 - Conceptual breakthroughs,
 - Dirac: Visions of an arm holding a silver tray with a card having the answer to the physics problem he was pondering.¹
- Reapplying CSL: Miracles come on “great” occasions (“great” in a personal sense).
- For faith-filled people, who are in close relationship with God, Miracles are a daily occurrence!

¹C. Albright, J. R. Albright and M. Turk, *Interactive world, interactive God*, p. 182

How Does God Interact in the World?

- John Haught: 2017
- Divine Action Project (1988-2003)
- Old view: God can violate physical laws that he made.
- Now: God does not violate physical laws:
 - Preserves regularity, free will and reason,
 - Universe as an Open System?
 - God changes initial conditions,
 - Quantum mechanics – initial conditions are probabilities that God can choose from.
- But God is free to inject into the world His unconditional love, whenever and however He chooses.



What is God's Intent?

- All **Miracles** (and Miracles) have meaning.
 - Miracles are **not** magic – God demonstrates action in the world in terms of explicit announcement .
 - True meaning → a more loving relationship with God and rest of humanity.
 - But many present-day Miracles seem to us as merely random events.
- Is it reasonable to presuppose we can infer God's thinking?
 - Isaiah 55: “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord.”
 - Job 38: “Then God answered Job out of the whirlwind...”
 - Certainly many sacred texts discuss God's will – but they have been interpreted in many different ways.
 - Instead, just marvel at the event, its consequences in terms of one's own life and relationship to God.

How Do We Get Back to the Beginning of the Summer?

- Michael Dennin:¹

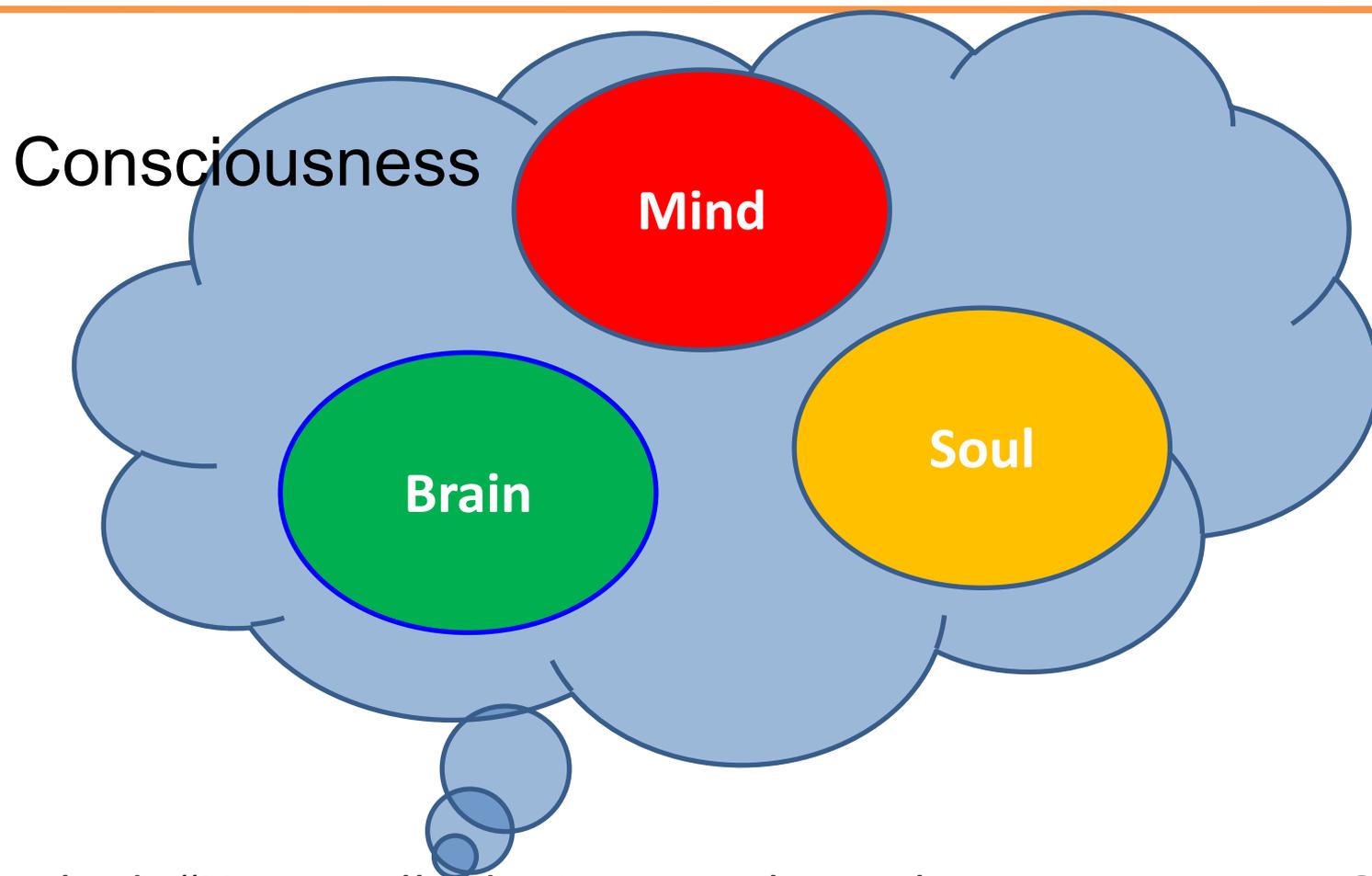
“We need not resort to the understanding of Miracle as an example of impossibility or unlikelihood. It is the **experience and interpretation** of a given event as **religiously significant** that allows us to frame it in miraculous terms. An important feature of this argument is that Miracles do not serve as the foundation of religious faith, but rather, presuppose religious faith.”
- Personal **experience and interpretation** → leads us back to “consciousness” and “mind/brain/soul”.
- **Religiously significant** → “embodiment”² and “emergent behavior in the brain → soul”²⁻³.

¹*Divine Science: Finding reason at the heart of faith*, p. 177. (Dennin is a physicist at UC Irvine.)

²Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *ibid*, p.134-135.

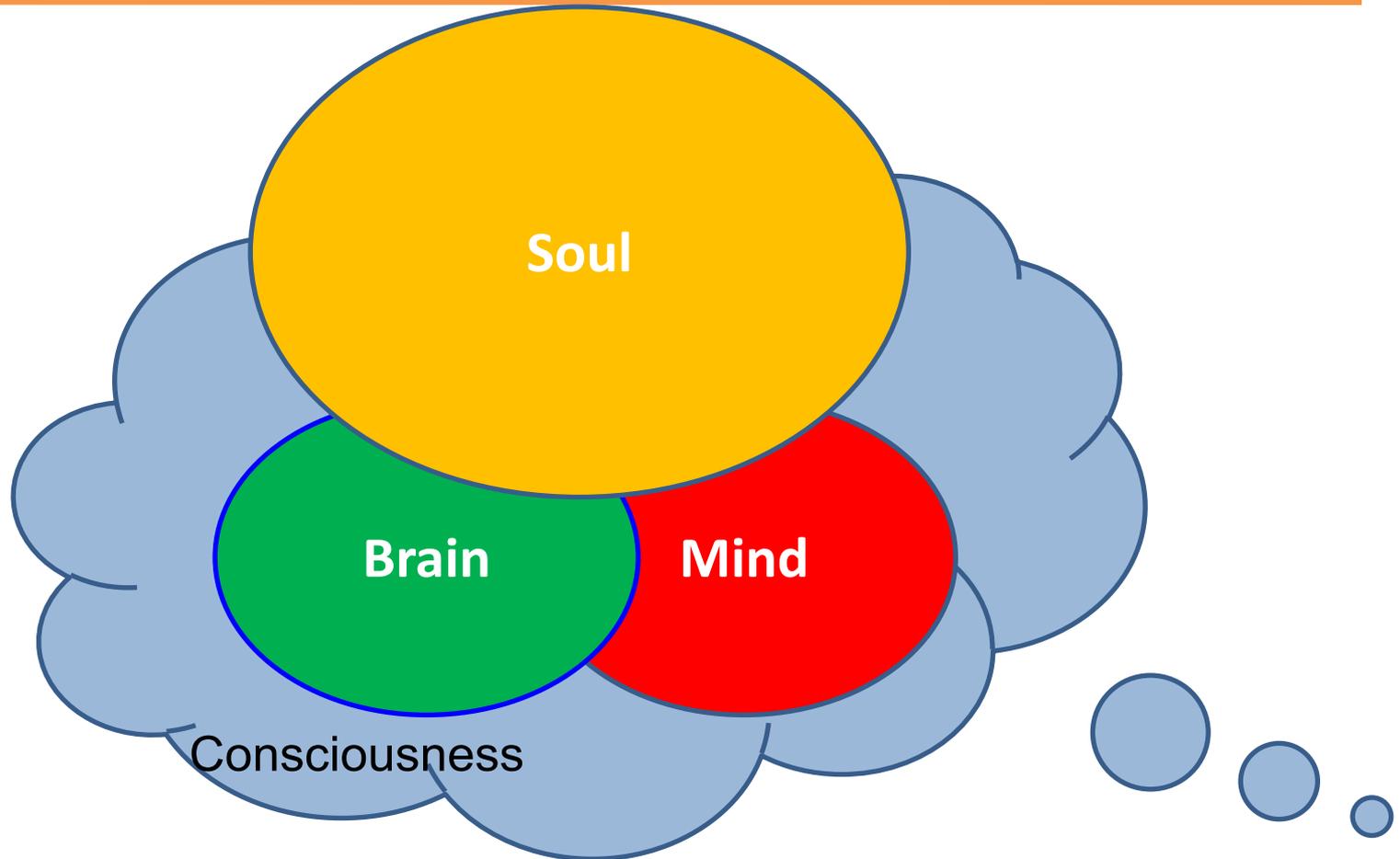
³M. Dennin, *ibid*, p. 154; also, Chick Keller: Lecture II.

For purposes of discussion this summer, Bob Reinovsky approached the question of consciousness by identifying three components....



He asked: “How really distinct are these three components?
Do they look like this....”

From my view, Bob's picture really looks like this!



Concluding question: How would you redraw Bob's picture?

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Abstract

Religious scriptures, human history, and our personal experiences also reveal that the human response to miracles is wonder, awe and fear, contrary to the expectations of natural determinism. A robot's programmed response to the same phenomena would be something like "Data does not compute". No surprise here – unlike robots, humans are made in the image and likeness of God and thus are inherently open to God's actions, however subtle or direct they may be.

In this last session of the summer series we discuss the nature of miracles. They clearly demonstrate the conflict between science, as expressed through the natural laws of the universe, and religion, as manifested through God's direct interaction in the world. We will define more accurately what miracles are, give a few examples from both the New and Old Testaments of the Bible as well as modern times and discuss them from both scientific and theological perspectives. We also briefly touch on the more difficult (from a human perspective) issues: how and why do miracles occur.

Finally, we tie the question of miracles back to where we started two months ago: to mind-brain-soul. This then leads to an open discussion of what we have learned during this summer and suggestions on what topics we might begin to consider this winter in developing next summer's series.

Discussion Questions

- Do you believe that Miracles demonstrate a serious conflict between science and religion?
- Is the conflict related to Miracles, more or less significant than in other areas, e.g., evolution?
- Have you, or anyone who know well, ever experienced a Miracle?
- What aspect of Miracles (scientific, religious, aesthetic) interests you the most?
- Do you think that the topic of Miracles fits well into the overall theme of “brain, mind, soul”?

Season Review Questions

- How has your understanding of the brain, mind and consciousness been significantly improved by the talks this summer?
- What aspect of this subject interested you the most?
- Do you think we have addressed the overall question (“Are you a robot?”) that we raised at the beginning?
- Would you like to see further exploration of this topic next summer?
- If no, what other topic(s) would you recommend that we consider instead?