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Suppose that one is presented with a report of a miracle as an exception to nature's usual course. Should one believe the report and so come to favour the idea that a god has acted miraculously? Hume argued that no reasonable person should do anything of the kind. Many religiously sceptical philosophers agree with him, and have both defended and developed his reasoning. Some theologians concur or offer other reasons why those who are believers in God should also refuse to accept accounts of miracles as accurate reportage. This book argues to the contrary. For Houston, miracle stories may contribute towards the reasonableness of belief in God, and, appropriately attested, may be accepted by believers in God. To bolster his case he examines historically and intellectually significant writings about the miraculous. And having argued for the rejection of Hume, he explores the implications of this rejection for science, history, and theology.

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# REPORTED MIRACLES

*A critique of Hume*

J. HOUSTON

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University of Glasgow*



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*To*  
*M. M. H.*

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I have been advancing (that is, both proposing and developing) some of the main ideas in this book on and off for about twenty-five years, and I am grateful to philosophical colleagues for encouraging me, whether they were inclined to agree with me or not, to think that there might be something in what I was saying; in particular Pat Shaw and Alexander Broadie, at different times, boosted my enthusiasm for the cause by the way in which they responded to the reading of papers on the subject. I am grateful to departmental colleagues for enabling me to have study leave at a time when the book needed sustained, momentum-building effort.

Cambridge University Press have been patient, tactful and unfailingly helpful. I am glad, and it is fitting, that they have wished to publish this book because it was a request from *Religious Studies* (published by Cambridge University Press) to review Mackie's book *The Miracle of Theism* which led me to try to put together the whole case against Hume which is this book's main point. I did not see how I could explain this case, in a way which would convince anyone, in the space of a review. Yet I could not produce a review which left this part of Mackie's discussion unscathed; so no review was ever forthcoming, and I can only offer the editors of *Religious Studies* my apologies. If Cambridge University Press feel that their earlier loss is now their gain, I shall be pleased to have made some amends there.

Many people have given secretarial assistance, and I thank them all. They include Jan Crawford, Jean Johnston, Marion Paton, Margaret Smith and Catherine Vost. Their helpfulness has been exemplary, frequently better than I deserved, and is much appreciated.

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At a needy time for us and a formative time for the book, the Buchans let us use a house of theirs. May their roses bloom.

My family has often put up with the distractedness and un-buoyant spirits of one who has something on his mind. My thanks and love to them, and especially to my wife to whom the book is dedicated.