

BOOK REVIEW

Smile of the Universe: Miracles in an Age of Disbelief by Michael Grosso. Anomalist Books, 2020. 228 pp. ISBN 978-1949501131.

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Smile of the Universe (2020) by Michael Grosso is a delightful book filled with magic and intrigue for the inquisitive reader. Grosso starts our journey with citing many historical events that have been deemed “miraculous” not only by the Catholic church, which seems to have had the corner on miracles since the Church’s beginnings, but also those that fall out of the realm of organized religion. What made this book delightful for me is that Grosso’s own particular interest in miracles resonates with mine, and I am fairly certain will resonate with many other readers.

In the opening pages of Grosso’s book he immediately makes it clear that he personally has experienced a miracle, several in fact. The reader then knows that this book is not just a documentation of dry historical events, but also a publication that presents phenomena the author himself has been personal witness to. We are immediately engaged in both the subjective and the objective: storytelling at its best. And what are miracles but human stories created around a set of unexplainable material events? A dream, what most believe to be purely subjective and containing no material substance at all, is not considered a miracle. But if that dream manifests in material form, then indeed it becomes miraculous. Not all miracles are first dreams of course, but all miracles do have a material construct, and what makes them a miracle is their stubbornness in ignoring the set, presently known, laws of nature.

The opening chapters tell the stories of many miracles. Many of them were first documented by the Catholic church. As mentioned above, the Catholic church has always had a robust interest in miracles as they are a required criterion for canonized sainthood (Romolo & Grant, 2019). Grosso defines a miracle as the term is used in his book:

A miracle, as I use the term, is an event that parapsychologists call *paranormal*, but of a particular type: *miracles are paranormal events that occur in the context of religious belief, symbols, and experience*. In a broader, looser sense, I will use the term to refer to any event that *prima facie* is physically unexplained, as with non-religious paranormal phenomena, a category much wider than the mainly religious. (p. xiv)

That said, many of the miracles cited are of the religious type.

It is beyond the scope of this review to comment on, or even list, the miracles that Grosso investigates. Although the individual stories are skillfully compressed to be certain that the reader gets enough to understand the full nature of the miracle, they all leave the reader wanting to learn more. Although I have become, over the years, familiar with most of what Grosso cites, I was quite excited to read of some miracles for the first time, and was left wondering why I had never run across these particular stories in my own research—one other reason this book was a delight! There definitely is always more out there to discover! Grosso also leaves some room, when it seems necessary, for skepticism. He presents the miracles “as they are” without any assumptions that would be easy to make if you are a believer, or a Catholic when referencing a Catholic/Christian event. Miracles are, after all, anomalies within the physical cause and effect universe; if they can be explained through a materialist lens, then they should be, as they then no longer fall under the definition of miracle. However, the removal of a miracle from the list of paranormal, metaphysical, occurrences does not always remove its meaning from the affected observers.

After the initial chapters of miracle presentations, Grosso asks some very important questions. One such question is whether a miracle, or what comprises a “beyond physical” event is in fact a “normal” element of reality. An element that has been all but eliminated through

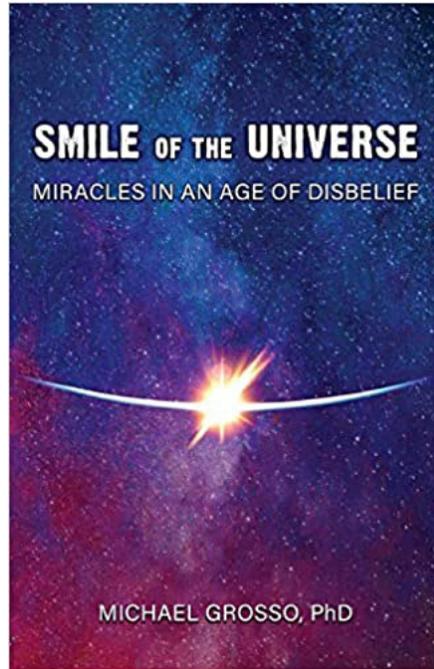
the current worship of dogmatic scientism and materialism. Grosso suggests:

The word *miracle* one might take as code word for powers latent in all human beings that manifest in special and mostly unpredictable conditions—a word that represents a temptation to push matters as far as possible to the edge of something altogether new. (p. 108)

In my own book *Ancient Egypt and Modern Psychology* (2017), I suggest that in the ancient culture of Egypt there may have been a time where people moved in and out of

a “non material” reality without even being aware of it since it was commonplace and simply part of their day-to-day reality. In this metaphysical state they could do miraculous things that did manifest in their material reality. Grosso also suggests this as a current tenet of Tibetan Buddhism: “. . . Tibetans have no words for miracle or paranormal but see such things as natural byproducts of spiritual training, of achieving highly concentrated states of mind” (p. 13).

Grosso devotes one of his final chapters to a concept he attributes to William Blake, *living by miracle*. Blake said, “As to Myself, about whom you are so kindly interested, I live by Miracle.”¹ Grosso ventures into a thorough investigation of this concept and how one would proceed to make it a tenet of their own life. Living by miracle could be described as living a life open to the day-to-day occurrences that are unexplainable by material science. But Grosso also suggests that living by miracle is living by the truths of one’s own individual construction of reality through an individual imaginal world. He says:



Words like Blake's have a ring of mystery, but what do they mean? Where can they take us? What would it feel like to live, move, and have our being from inside a miracle-conducive world? I'm of the opinion that we have to follow our own path to become decently evolved individuals. (p. 117)

Grosso continues with this theme for the remainder of his book. He questions how we could go about living a life where all experience is integrated into the lived life, not only the material reality but a non-material reality, a transcendent awareness. Grosso says:

We may think of ourselves as part of a subliminal self that is greater, wiser, and stronger than our everyday selves. Just being aware of the deeper possible relationship with our unknown self has a power to liberate us. It is a momentous shift in perspective, realizing that part of you lies in a kind of normal latency and oblivion, awaiting the right circumstances to be awakened. (p. 144)

Here is where the message of Grosso's book becomes of paramount importance. He then journeys into different examples of spiritual practice from various cultures and within various historical contexts. He touches on Greek philosophy, Hebrew prophets, he tells the story of Joan of Arc and her visions and voices that led her to lead the French army into the Dauphin. He writes about the early diviners of ancient Greece, and the course of scientific mind through the subliminal mind. He presents the story of Ramanujan, the Indian mathematical genius whose unprecedented ability of connecting seemingly unrelated mathematical concepts came through a spiritual, metaphysical, conduit to the Dravidian goddess Namagiri. All of these are wonderful examples of an integration of the physical, material, perception of the physical world, and a subliminal world of meaning and purpose beyond the material that surfaces into consciousness through means other than the physical senses.

I will conclude my review of this excellent and inspiring book with a quote from the author in his last chapter: *Last Words: Beyond Science and Religion*:

We have tracked and confronted various reports of miracles, tried to peel away cultural accretions, and zeroed in on the empirical core. Miracles, the most extreme forms of paranormal phenomena, stretch our imagination of the possible. Encased often but not all the time in religious settings, access can be convoluted and awkward. What I found reveals a dizzying picture of super-human abilities, a mirror image of what I believe is latent in us all, by virtue of our being grounded in the substratum of the One Mind—the working hypothesis of this book. (p. 181)

NOTE

¹ From a letter to Blake's friend George Cumberland, 1799.

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