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## Metaphysics of Extraordinary Events

Olağanüstü Olayların Metafiziği

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## Metaphysics of Extraordinary Events

### Abstract

How can an event be extraordinary? What is the metaphysical background necessary to believe that extraordinary events are possible? The possibility of extraordinary events can be approached from metaphysical, epistemic, and scientific perspectives. Metaphysical explanations are extraordinary events that transcend nature or violate the regular structure in nature. Epistemological explanations, on the other hand, are explanations of extraordinary events by referring either to our lack of knowledge about nature or to our inadequacy of knowledge about events. Scientific explanations recognize phenomena that have been observed or experimented on but have not yet been explained by any theory. In this article, I focus on metaphysical and epistemological explanations. We see that three basic assumptions are used for a metaphysical explanation: 1) There must be an orderly operation called Nature. 2) The process in nature can be violated. 3) There is a compatibility between the mind and the world. With the adoption of these three assumptions by different philosophers in various combinations, two kinds of metaphysical explanations arise: extraordinary as supernatural and extraordinary by appealing to the principle of sufficient reason.

According to the first type of explanation, extraordinary events are events caused by what is beyond nature, exceeding nature, or violating the workings of nature. In order to explain extraordinary events with the supernatural, there is a need to violate the metaphysical necessities on which nature is based, such as the principle of causality. An approach represented by philosophers such as St. Augustine, al-Ghazālī, Richard Swinburne, and Nazif Muhtaroglu claims that it is possible for a supernatural event to occur, claiming that the functioning of nature is not necessary. But if there is no metaphysical necessity in nature such as the principle of causality, how can an extraordinary event violate anything? Both Swinburne and St. Augustine answer this question with the argument that the principle of causality is effective in nature and that principle can be violated by God, a supernatural power. Al-Ghazālī and Muhtaroglu, on the other hand, prefer not to accept the effectiveness of causality in the functioning of nature. Thus, all activity in nature will be attributed to God, and extraordinary events will gain the same status as ordinary events. The point that unites these views is the belief that the operation in nature is not necessary, with or without causality. Philosophers with this belief could not successfully explain extraordinary events because they could not ground their understanding of nature and the supernatural. Moreover, when we analyze their approach to the problem, we see that ordinary and extraordinary events cannot be separated from each other, since no other principle is put forward to replace the principle of causality.

The second type of explanation is the explanation of extraordinary events by applying the principle of sufficient reason. The philosophers represented by Ibn Sīnā and Leibniz consider it necessary both metaphysically and epistemologically that everything in nature needs sufficient reason to come to be. According to them, no event can take place without sufficient cause. In this respect, there must be sufficient reason for extraordinary events to occur as well as ordinary ones. Both philosophers argue that extraordinary events are metaphysically possible events in nature, but their occurrence does not violate principles such as causality. According to this type of explanation, extraordinary events are not supernatural. Ibn Sīnā, using the concept of nature in its metaphysical sense, argued that forces beyond matter are also effective in nature. Meanwhile, he maintained the necessity of the causality principle. In this way, it is possible to have previously unknown results from known causes. For example, the human soul can affect different bodies through celestial realms, just as it affects its own body. However, this interaction does not violate the necessity of the causality principle, on the contrary, it means the discovery of the necessary structure of nature. In short, the epistemological approaches of Leibniz and Ibn Sīnā, which they developed while preserving the metaphysical necessity of causation, do not require denying extraordinary events without examining them, but also offer a stronger basis for the possibility of extraordinary events, as they expand the limits of our knowledge of nature.

**Key Words:** Philosophy of Religion, Metaphysics, Causality, Necessity, Extraordinary, Miracle, Nature, the Principle of Sufficient Reason, Supernatural.

### Olağanüstü Olayların Metafiziği

#### Öz

Bir olayın olağanüstü olup olmadığına dair yargılar ne şekilde temellendirilebilir? Olağanüstü olayların mümkün olduğuna inanmak için gerekli metafizik arka plan nedir? Olağanüstü olayların imkanına, metafizik, epistemik ve bilimsel açılarından yaklaşılabilir. Metafizik açıklamalar, olağanüstü olayların doğayı aştığı veya doğadaki düzenli yapıyı ihlal ettiği şeklindedir. Epistemolojik açıklamalar ise, olağanüstü olayların ya doğa hakkında bilgimizin eksikliğine ya da olaylar hakkındaki bilgimizin yetersizliğine atıf yaparak açıklanmasıdır. Bilimsel açıklamalar, gözlem veya deneylerle sabit olmuş ama herhangi bir teori ile henüz açıklanamamış olayları olağanüstü kabul eder. Ben bu makalede metafizik ve epistemolojik açıklamalar üzerine eğiliyorum. Metafizik bir açıklama için üç temel varsayımın kullanıldığını görüyoruz: 1) Doğa adında düzenli bir işleyiş olmalıdır. 2) Doğadaki işleyiş ihlal

edilebilir. 3) Zihin ile dünya arasında bir uyumluluk vardır. Bu üç varsayımın çeşitli kombinasyonlarla farklı düşünürler tarafından benimsenmesiyle iki tür metafizik açıklama doğar: doğaüstü olarak olağanüstü ve yeter neden ilkesine başvuru.

İlk tür açıklamaya göre, olağanüstü olaylar doğanın ötesinde, doğayı aşan veya doğanın işleyişini ihlal eden olaylardır. Olağanüstü olayları, doğaüstü ile açıklamak için nedensellik ilkesi gibi doğanın dayandığı metafizik zorunlulukların ihlal edilmesine ihtiyaç vardır. Richard Swinburne, Aziz Agustinus, Gazâlî ve Nazif Muhtaroglu'nun temsil ettiği filozoflar doğanın işleyişinin zorunlu olmadığını ileri sürerek doğaüstü bir olayın gerçekleşmesinin mümkün olduğunu kanıtlamak istemişlerdir. Ancak doğada nedensellik ilkesi gibi metafizik bir zorunluluk yoksa, olağanüstü bir olayın herhangi bir şeyi ihlal etmesi nasıl söz konusu olabilir? Bu soruya, Swinburne ve Aziz Augustinus hem doğada nedensellik ilkesinin etkin olduğu hem de nedenselliğin doğaüstü bir güç olan Tanrı tarafından ihlal edilebileceği cevabını verirler. Gazâlî ve Muhtaroglu ise doğanın işleyişinde nedenselliğin etkinliğini kabul etmemeyi tercih ederler. Böylece doğadaki tüm etkinlik Tanrı'ya atfedilecek ve olağanüstü olaylar da olağan olaylarla aynı statüde olacaktır. Bu görüşleri birleştiren nokta, nedensellik olsun veya olmasın doğadaki işleyişin zorunlu olmadığı inancıdır. Bu inanca sahip filozoflar, doğa ve doğaüstü anlayışlarını temellendiremedikleri için olağanüstü olayları başarılı bir şekilde açıklayamamışlardır. Dahası, onların soruna yaklaşımlarını analiz ettiğimizde görürüz ki, nedensellik yerine başka bir ilke de ileri sürülmediği için, olağan ile olağanüstü olaylar birbirlerinden ayrılamaz.

İkinci tür açıklama ise olağanüstü olayların yeter neden ilkesine başvurarak açıklanmasıdır. Leibniz ve İbn Sînâ'nın temsil ettiği filozoflar, doğada olan her şeyin yeterli bir nedeni olmasını hem metafizik hem epistemolojik olarak zorunlu sayarlar. Onlara göre, yeterli nedeni olmayan hiçbir olay gerçekleşemez. Bu minvalde, olağan olaylar kadar olağanüstü olayların da gerçekleşmesi için yeterli neden olmalıdır. Her iki filozof da olağanüstü olayların, doğada metafizik olarak mümkün olaylardan olduğunu ancak gerçekleşmesi için nedensellik gibi ilkeleri ihlal etmediklerini savunurlar. Bu açıklamaya göre, olağanüstü olaylar doğaüstü değildir. İbn Sina, doğa kavramını metafizik anlamıyla kullanarak, maddenin ötesinde güçlerin de doğada etkin olduğunu savunmuştur. Bu sırada, nedensellik ilkesinin zorunluluğunu korumuştur. Bu sayede, bilinen nedenlerden daha önce bilinmeyen sonuçların çıkması mümkündür. Örneğin insan ruhu, tıpkı kendi bedenine etki ettiği gibi göksel felekler aracılığıyla farklı bedenlere de etki edebilir. Ancak bu etkileşim nedensellik ilkesinin zorunluluğunu ihlal etmez, aksine doğanın zorunlu yapısının keşfi anlamına gelir. Kısacası, İbn Sînâ ve Leibniz'in metafizik zorunluluk taşıyan nedenselliği koruyarak geliştirdikleri epistemolojik yaklaşımları, olağanüstü olayları incelemeyi gerektirmediği gibi doğa hakkındaki bilgimizin sınırlarını genişlettiği için olağanüstü olayların imkanına dair daha güçlü bir dayanak sunar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Din Felsefesi, Metafizik, Nedensellik, Zorunluluk, Olağanüstü, Mucize, Doğa, Yeter Neden İlkesi, Doğaüstü.

## Introduction

In this article, I explore the possibility of a metaphysical explanation for extraordinary events. Could there really be an extraordinary event? If so, how can it be defended? If not, on what grounds can this be rejected? These questions are of great importance in believing that something truly extraordinary such as miracles has occurred. We believe that an extraordinary event has occurred only if a metaphysical explanation can be offered. For this reason, after briefly analyzing three basic assumptions of metaphysical explanations, I will examine in depth two different approaches to extraordinary. One refers to supernatural, the other to the principle of sufficient reason. Based on the discussions that followed, I point out that since the first kind of explanation requires violation of the causal order of nature, which has to be necessary in the first place to be violated, they fail to account for the possibility of extraordinary events. Their failure is most evident in the absence of a metaphysical criterion to distinguish an extraordinary event from ordinary events. Therefore, there is no enough articulation about the violation of the laws of nature or suspending of causality by an extraordinary event. I also argue to the extent that nature is assumed by an appeal to the principle of sufficient reason, epistemological explanations offer stronger support for their possibility.

## 1. The Concept of Extraordinary

Everyday experience gives rise to a widespread belief that the same events will produce the same or very similar results. This orderly functioning of events is interrupted when unknown results emerge from known events. When we see someone walking on a dirt road, we think that

it is a normal occurrence based on our previous experience. However, if we see someone walking on water, we are excused to call it an extraordinary event. When we see or hear about an extraordinary event, can we explain it? What do we refer to if we want to explain this? Is there any justification for the belief that an extraordinary event can actually occur?

Before we begin, I should state that there is no serious difference in terms of our reaction between encountering an extraordinary event and hearing about it. As long as the analysis made in this article is considered, whether an extraordinary event has been seen personally or heard from someone else is not significant. Whether you encounter or hear about an extraordinary event, you can still ask for an explanation or accept it without explanation. Leaving aside the emotional response to the event itself, one can always question the possibility of an event regardless of the way one encounters it.

There are three types of explanations for extraordinary events: metaphysical, epistemological, and scientific. The metaphysical explanation asserts that an ordered structure that makes ordinary events possible is interrupted, violated, or surpassed. This type of explanation must presuppose that ordinary events occur in a metaphysical order called nature. An extraordinary event originates from a cause that goes beyond nature. Thus, in metaphysical explanations, extraordinary events are supernatural. An alternative metaphysical explanation can be provided by appealing to the principle of sufficient reason. According to this explanation, everything has to have a cause. If something beyond nature provides a sufficient reason for the events in nature, an extraordinary event can be accounted for without recourse to nature itself.

The epistemological explanation goes against the immediate characterization of extraordinary events as supernatural. For this kind of explanation, an extraordinary event is one whose causes are unknown. Epistemological explanations can take two forms. First, someone making this statement might think that there is no difference between an extraordinary event and an ordinary event, assuming that nature operates in a certain order and that the causes of an extraordinary event are unknown. Second, one may avoid making any assumptions about nature because of the limitations of our knowledge and perception. For him, this extraordinary event was completely unknown to us. As for the scientific explanation, it refers to situations in which certain events cannot be explained by the current scientific paradigm. If there is an unexpected result in the observation and experiment, the theories about the observation in question are insufficient. In this case, the event is considered extraordinary until the theory is transformed, or a new theory is developed.<sup>1</sup> Metaphysical and epistemological explanations can be advanced in various ways. I will examine some of these combinations in due course. Although it is closely related to metaphysical and epistemological explanations, scientific explanations of extraordinary events are excluded from the scope of this article because of limited space, and left to be dealt with in a future article.

## **2. Three Basic Assumptions**

Metaphysical explanations of extraordinary events have three basic assumptions. The first assumption is that the world is structured as a causal order, called nature. Second, causality in nature can be violated or transcended. Third, correspondence between the mind and the world is required. The evaluation of the two metaphysical explanations is based on an understanding of these basic assumptions.

<sup>1</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 52-66.

First, metaphysical explanation makes sense in cosmologies that maintain a closed structure called nature. In the classical universe picture, which was systematized with metaphysical explanations by Plato and Aristotle and became widespread with the detailed explanations of cosmologists such as Ptolemy and Galen, everything that exists forms a hierarchically integrated structure. In this structure, which has roughly two main realms, celestial bodies and the sublunar world, every object and event has a cause.<sup>2</sup> In other words, the orderly functioning of the world points to a causal connection between objects and events. Nature consists of the regular instead of irregular, unpredictable, random operation of events. This orderly function is known as the principle of causality.

According to the second assumption, although events operate in an orderly manner by the principle of causality, a single event can violate this principle. This means that a known object can be involved in an unknown event, or that known causes have unknown consequences. Thus, an extraordinary event cannot be explained by some cause in nature, as it is not based on the principle of causality. In other words, it is accepted that an event outside of causality is metaphysically possible and violates the principle of causality. For example, it is an extraordinary event for humans to fly without using tools. Because of the nature of man, mass does not normally allow man to fly without using a tool. If we see a flying person, we have to conclude that the principle of causality regarding man and mass has been violated. Thus, extraordinary events have been attributed to supernatural powers, and often to God's direct intervention.

God, who is the creator of order in theistic beliefs, can make extraordinary interventions in nature called miracles. By allowing the breaking or surpassing of the principle of causality, a metaphysical explanation implies that the principle of causality is not metaphysically necessary. However, this implication is inconsistent with our first assumption. This assumption, on which an order in nature is required, seems to be threatened when the order is contingent. For an event to be supernatural, there have to be natural events. Theist theologians and philosophers have tried to eliminate this threat by ascribing the aforementioned necessity to the imposition of God.

The third basic assumption concerns the connection between the mind and world. To provide a metaphysical explanation of an extraordinary event, there should be no doubt that there is a certain level of correspondence between the mind and the world. This shows that metaphysical explanations depend on the condition that causes in nature are explanations at the same time. The repetition of events that occur as a cause and effect in nature allows us to recognize the objects involved in these events. For ordinary events, every explanation is a reason. If there is no correspondence between the mind and world, it is not possible to explain the metaphysical causes of an event. Even though the world and its structure are mind-independent, our minds are capable of figuring out its functioning insofar as to justify that an extraordinary event has taken place. Our minds may not be capable of completely uncovering the causal structure, but a partial correspondence is sufficient to argue for orderly functioning. In other words, explanations of extraordinary events inevitably depend on realist metaphysics.

To summarize, metaphysical explanations of extraordinary events are possible when a causal order called nature is assumed, but this order can be violated or surpassed in some way. It is also assumed that the mind and world correspond at least partially. We can now proceed to the evaluation of two metaphysical explanations based on these assumptions.

<sup>2</sup> İshak Arslan, *Çağdaş Doğa Düşüncesi* (Küre Yayınları, 2016), 40.

### 3. Metaphysical Explanations for the Extraordinary Events

Although there might be multiple metaphysical explanations, I should point out that the following two are the most commonly appealed, especially among theist philosophers of religion. While the two can be defended separately or in combination, I will evaluate them better by treating them as separate explanations to demonstrate their strengths.

Extraordinary as supernatural: Some metaphysical views hold that there are things beyond the natural world that cannot be explained by science or empirical observation. These may include supernatural beings or phenomena, such as God, angels, or miracles. From this perspective, an event is extraordinary if it goes beyond the laws of nature and cannot be explained by purely naturalistic means. The born without a father, the resurrection of the dead, and the splitting of the sea are examples of such events.

Extraordinary as violating the principle of sufficient reason: The principle of sufficient reason is the idea that everything that exists must have an adequate explanation or a cause. In this view, anything that goes against this principle is extraordinary because it lacks an explanation or has an incomprehensible and mysterious explanation, such as events that supposedly transcend nature. This kind of explanation finds the reasons for extraordinary events in nature because nature, which is said to be surpassed, must possess epistemic integrity.

In general, the metaphysical notion of the extraordinary involves a departure from the ordinary or expected, and often raises fundamental questions about the nature of reality and our ability to understand it. Explanations of the metaphysical status of extraordinary events have an interesting theoretical background that clearly reveal assumptions about nature and how natural knowledge is obtained.

#### 3.1. Extraordinary as Supernatural

Richard Swinburne describes the regularity in the world with laws of nature as “simply summaries of the powers and assets that have the same powers and assets as other substances of the same kind.”<sup>3</sup> Swinburne’s approach to extraordinary events is also shaped within this framework.

First, Swinburne wanted to prove the existence of God based on the orderly functioning of the universe. Although this cannot be proven with certainty, according to him, God’s existence is more likely than his non-existence because of design in nature. Before proposing this reasoning, we see that Swinburne speaks of two types of regularity in nature. Spatial regularity refers to the harmony of all beings in the universe, as in the human eye, or the structure of galaxies. William Paley’s famous watchmaker argument was put forward based on the spatial order.<sup>4</sup> Swinburne says that there is a second regularity, which he calls temporal upon which he based his argument. Temporal regularity occurs when one event follows another, such as falling to the ground if one jumps from a height. Accordingly, temporal regularity explains spatial regularity.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, what can explain the temporal order?

According to Swinburne, science explains the regularity of exchanges between objects through nature’s laws.<sup>6</sup> For example, if we jump from a high place, we fall according to the law of gravity. Therefore, what is the explanation of nature’s laws? Swinburne concludes that the laws of nature

<sup>3</sup> Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: New York: Clarendon Press, 2004), 277.

<sup>4</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, ed. Matthew D. Eddy - David Knight (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

<sup>5</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 167.

<sup>6</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 155 f.

cannot be explained by science and that science can explain the most constrained laws of nature with more general laws. But ultimately, because these general laws are scientifically unexplained, a person outside of nature must exist to explain the laws of nature. It is especially important that this being is a person because temporal regularity in the laws of nature always works to achieve a purpose. As Swinburne observed, acting with purpose is only a characteristic of beings with personality. In conclusion, since there is no other explanation for the orderly functioning of the laws of nature, the most plausible explanation is that a person other than nature creates nature in an orderly fashion. Swinburne shared the first basic assumption of a metaphysical explanation.

Swinburne's attempt to explain extraordinary events has come under this framework. First, the condition for an event to be defined as supernatural is that the objects of the type involved in the event behave differently in that single event from in similar events. For example, walking on water is supernatural compared to similar events involving water and human objects. Of course, Swinburne also considered the possibility that the event in question could be explained by the as-yet-unknown laws of nature. However, this possibility should be considered if, for example, more than one person walks on water in different places, because it is very complicated to explain an event that happens only once with a completely unknown, extremely closed, distant, or incomprehensible law. The explanation that this event was brought about by a supernatural being like God, who can violate the laws of nature, is preferred to a complex explanation because it is simpler. In other words, according to Swinburne, it is more plausible to describe a one-time extraordinary event as a violation of a known law by supernatural intervention rather than being dependent on an unknown law.<sup>7</sup> Such singular cases are extraordinary enough to be explained by science. Swinburne also embraces the second basic assumption of metaphysical explanations.

Hume's critique of miracles can be directed toward Swinburne's argument. What if an event that seems extraordinary to us is in itself an irregularity in our perception? Hume strongly emphasized the importance of background information when evaluating events. What we refer to when trying to explain an event we encounter is the "relevant" background information that we have built up from previous experiences. Swinburne defends himself against this criticism by questioning his background knowledge. If the background of someone encountering an extraordinary event is based on explaining the orderly functioning of the laws of nature as dependent on God, then the same person may interpret this experience as God's violation of natural laws.<sup>8</sup> The background knowledge of someone who sees God as a designer of nature is directly related to the violation of the laws of nature. Swinburne's commitment to the third basic assumption cannot be overlooked. He believes that the mind and world correspond to the extent to which we can know what is going on in nature, even if it is partial knowledge.

Swinburne adopted all three basic assumptions. However, an important objection to the explanation that extraordinary events can be supernatural has been made by J. L. Mackie. He claims that while evaluating the possibility of miracles, first of all, the person who claims that an extraordinary event has had a double obligation:

...where there is some plausible testimony about the occurrence of what would appear to be a miracle, those who accept this as a miracle have the double burden of showing both that the event took place and that it violated the laws of nature. But it will be very hard to sustain this double

<sup>7</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 279.

<sup>8</sup> Swinburne, *The Existence of God*, 284.

burden. For whatever tends to show that it would have been a violation of natural law tends for that very reason to make it most unlikely that it actually happened.<sup>9</sup>

But that's not all. Because, according to Mackie, the same event can be explained in accordance with the laws of nature. Moreover, it may be possible to extend the relevant laws of nature to explain such situations. Therefore, liability does not end even if the event is proven. According to him, the second obligation included two separate tasks. For an event to be supernatural, it must first be fully proven, and second, the event described as supernatural must be proven to be an exception. According to Mackie, meeting the first obligation is quite difficult because the laws of nature cannot be broadly formulated to cover all ordinary events. Known laws allow only short-term forecasts to be made using available data. For example, there is no theory explaining the highly complex radio waves received from deep space. However, the fact that these waves were detected does not indicate that they operate according to any law. On the other hand, if the second task also claims that the event described as supernatural constitutes an exception to the law, it is very difficult to prove. In the same example, if radio waves carry a supernatural feature, to say that they exist despite certain laws of nature, there must be completely comprehensive knowledge of the law of nature. Based on this reasoning, Mackie argued that the evidence was too weak to believe that extraordinary events, including miracles, occurred.

Do Mackie's objections require denying that an event is extraordinary even if it cannot be proven? He admitted that the possibility of supernatural events cannot be denied a priori. In this case, is Swinburne's claim that the laws of nature are violated by God as a supernatural power more acceptable? Even if this is true in principle, the tasks Mackie proposed show that it is extremely difficult to characterize an event as metaphysically ordinary or extraordinary. Whether you have heard it from someone or witnessed it yourself, your background knowledge must accompany you to determine the metaphysical state of an extraordinary event. However, does someone with a theistic background need a criterion to distinguish between ordinary and extraordinary events? In other words, even if God is acclaimed as the designer of nature, it is not possible to judge a supernatural event by looking at it. We do not have a metaphysical criterion in the theistic background that can distinguish between an event conforming to the laws of nature and a supernatural event. When we believe that God brought about both kinds of events, it is more important to have a metaphysical criterion that distinguishes the two types of events. The basic assumptions underlying Swinburne's account fall short of giving him a criterion.

Probably due to the difficulty of distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary events, St. Augustine says that miracles are actually part of nature, that is extraordinary events as attributable to nature as ordinary events that we observe in the universe, of which God is ultimately the creator.<sup>10</sup> Blurring the line between miracles and natural events St. Augustine seeks to come up with a single metaphysical principle to explain all events. However, a single principle of causality fails to account for two types of events. On the one hand the existence of miracles by direct intervention of the creator God implies that nature is open to change. On the other hand, the causal laws of nature remain operative by the work of the creator God. St. Augustine states also in some other place that God can create without recourse to causes in nature.<sup>11</sup> His commitment to the first and second assumptions is clear. However, attributing the

<sup>9</sup> J. L. Mackie, *The Miracle of Theism: Arguments for and against the Existence of God* (Oxford: New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God, Books XVII-XXII* (CUA Press, 2008), 431 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Hasan Aydın, *İlkçağdan Ortaçağa Doğa Tasarımları ve Nedensellik* (İstanbul: Bilim ve Gelecek Kitaplığı, 2022), 253.

orderly functioning of nature to human cognition, he seems unwilling to embrace the third assumption, which makes it difficult to expect a criterion from him for distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary events.<sup>12</sup> In this case, St. Augustine joins Swinburne in having an unjustified assumption that there is a fundamental divide between natural and supernatural events. It can be maintained that this assumption is not supported by any evidence and that it is therefore unreasonable to posit the existence of supernatural entities or phenomena.

Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī proposes a radical solution to the problem. al-Ghazālī argued that extraordinary events such as miracles cannot be rejected with a theoretical explanation such as causality. He attributed the regularity in nature to God's orderly creation. According to him, there is no difference between God's creation of objects in ordinary events and His creation in extraordinary events. Al-Ghazālī does not believe that objects have a power of their own. There is no essence. He argues that the regularity in nature is attributed to God's habitual creation. He concludes that so-called causality between objects does not hold, let alone imply necessity. When the principle of causality is invalidated, the involvement of any object in ordinary and extraordinary events is the same thing from the point of view of God's power. God, who creates nature regularly, can create known objects in unknown events whenever He wishes since He is not subject to any obligation. This is no different from God's first creation of the world and its contents. For al-Ghazālī, the objects in the world do not have the property of necessitating themselves or anything else. He claims that an extraordinary or ordinary event can be explained by a supernatural rather than a natural connection.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, it seems that al-Ghazālī defends the metaphysical possibility thesis in a theological context, but still accepts that the regularity in nature actually stems from the habit of the succession of events. At this point, it is not entirely clear whether the habit (custom) is in God's creative activity or the human mind. The first option represents God's creation in an order, termed *sunnatullah*, which is an appeal to the second basic assumption for metaphysical explanations. Given al-Ghazālī rejects the first assumption, what seems like nature in al-Ghazālī's world crumbles into a series of contingent events. If 'habit' is understood as in the second option, it implies a rejection of the third assumption.<sup>14</sup> Although al-Ghazālī did not hesitate to attribute an epistemological certainty to causality in his other works, he opposes that causality expresses metaphysical necessity.<sup>15</sup> Whether al-Ghazālī supports either of the options, it should not be overlooked that his main thesis is metaphysical.<sup>16</sup> In any case, if both ordinary and extraordinary events indicate God's direct creation, then no criterion is needed because, from his theological standpoint, every event becomes ultimately extraordinary. To put it briefly, al-Ghazālī tries to solve the problem by dissolving the difference between ordinary and extraordinary in favor of the latter. Even though this move maintains the possibility of extraordinary events, it does not provide us with a metaphysical criterion.

<sup>12</sup> John A. Hardon, "The Concept of Miracle from St. Augustine to Modern Apologetics", *Theological Studies* 15/2 (May 1954), 229-257.

<sup>13</sup> al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers=Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 173.

<sup>14</sup> İsmail Hanoğlu, "Gazali Düşüncesinde Nominalizm ve Eşyanın Hakikati Sorunu", *Birey ve Toplum Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 2/3 (2012), 85-97.

<sup>15</sup> Kemal Batak, "Doğa Yasalarının Zorunluluğu, İlahi Fiil Ve Mucize -Tanrı Dünyada Fiilde Bulunabilir Mi?", *Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 11/20 (2009), 23-47.

<sup>16</sup> Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 97.

Expressing more strongly the view that everything is extraordinary, Nazif Muhtaroglu touched on the problem of criterion. Muhtaroglu, who evaluates the issue from an occasionalist perspective, claims that limited beings cannot cause other limited beings and that all of them were created and therefore everything created will be considered a miracle. According to him, the element of wonder that distinguishes between ordinary and extraordinary events is psychological and draws attention to the divine meaning behind the superficial regularity in nature.<sup>17</sup> However, Muhtaroglu is still aware of the need to distinguish between ordinary and extraordinary events. Thus, he evaluates miracles in three hierarchical orders. The first order includes ordinary events, the second order includes practically impossible but physically possible events, and the third order includes events that seem to transcend nature as we know it. While things, like moving at a speed that seems impossible according to the laws we know, can be examples of miracles of the second level, it is difficult to find examples of miracles of the third level. Because:

...with new scientific discoveries what we have termed as “the laws of nature” may turn out to be just particular generalizations of more intricate laws. Newtonian laws were supposed to be universally valid; this came to an end with the discovery of the laws of quantum mechanics. Now, most scientists consider the laws of quantum mechanics to be deeper laws from which the Newtonian laws can be derived, but the reverse is not true. Thus, an event which contravenes Newtonian physics might be consistent within quantum mechanics. In addition, the prophetic miracles, such as Prophet Muhammad’s splitting of the moon into two or Prophet Moses’s parting of the Red Sea might be able to be explained by some laws which have as yet not been discovered. Who can guarantee that these events are not part of the phenomenal order?<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that the extraordinary events that Muhtaroglu thinks can take place in the third order are the ones that can be easily evaluated in the second order. Especially if a causal explanation of a third-order event is made as a result of scientific research, it should be said that they are also secondary-order events. However, according to Muhtaroglu, who did not leave the subject here, a pragmatic criterion such as establishing prophethood can be applied to events from the third level:

It is very plausible to believe that God changed his manner of creation to confirm the prophecy claim of His messengers against any challenge, allowing them to be perceived by others as the messenger of the Creator of this universe.<sup>19</sup>

However, it is clear that this criterion will not be sufficient to separate ordinary and extraordinary events from a metaphysical point of view. Because the “ordinary miracle” in the first order and the “extraordinary miracle” in the second and third orders are in the same (limited or possible) metaphysical category. At this point, the criterion that he presented as “content supporting prophecy” can only distinguish these events from extraordinary events that cannot be considered a miracle, not from ordinary events. Extraordinary events in cults and occult teachings, common folk beliefs, legends, and fairy tales share with miracles the feature of not being denied a priori. Since these too would be considered extraordinary, Muhtaroglu’s criterion of “support” only determines the religious value of an event. Following al-Ghazali’s lead,

<sup>17</sup> Nazif Muhtaroglu, “An Occasionalist Approach to Miracles”, *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 22 (2009), 71–93.

<sup>18</sup> Muhtaroglu, “An Occasionalist Approach to Miracles”, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Muhtaroglu, “An Occasionalist Approach to Miracles”, 90.

Muhtaroğlu's account renounces the first basic assumption while clinging firmly to the second. Although it is not clear whether he also follows al-Ghazālī in doing away with the third assumption, a metaphysical criterion for distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary events is not offered. Muhtaroğlu insists that the occasionalist perspective does not allow postulating such a criterion.

While the "everything is extraordinary" approach may avoid the problem of setting criteria for distinguishing between the ordinary and the extraordinary, it does not provide a strong position to offer a metaphysical explanation of extraordinary events. Although he strongly criticizes metaphysical justification for the principle of causality, Hume also denies the possibility of miracles on similar grounds. Just as one cannot claim that there is a necessary cause-effect relationship between objects of experience, he cannot claim either that causes and effects are metaphysically tied directly to God. Because, according to Hume, causes and effects are drawn from experience as a mental habit. Since God is not an object of experience, a relationship between God and nature cannot be habitually deduced.<sup>20</sup>

### **3.2. The Structure of Nature and the Supernatural**

Perhaps the most important question to be answered, by those who think extraordinary events are supernatural and reject causality, is whether order in nature is necessary. For these thinkers who take nature as contingent, of course, the laws of nature seem to be open to surpassing or violating. If the laws of nature and causality are not necessary, of course, the cause of the order in question must be beyond nature. But what if the laws of nature are necessary? The basic assumption of Swinburne and others who offer similar arguments is that the laws of nature are not necessary. To speak from Hume's critique of causality, we only experience successive events in nature. However, it is not logically possible to deduce from this experience that there is necessity in nature. But then is it possible to deduce from this experience that there is no necessity? Of course, it is possible that the sun will rise in the west tomorrow, but it is very improbable. To say that the sunrise in the west is logically possible means that it is conceivable. Yet, it is also considered improbable because this possibility denotes only conceivability. In order to understand whether the sunrise from the west is metaphysically possible, we need to know everything about the sun, planets, and other forces in space, matter, and energy. Since we do not know these in full, it would be an argument from ignorance to say that the sun can actually rise in the east. Although it cannot be claimed a posteriori that causality is necessary, it cannot be claimed a posteriori either that causality is not necessary. In fact, if we look at the orderly operation in nature, the principle of causation is more likely to be necessary. All we can state is that if the principle of causality in nature is necessary, extraordinary events such as miracles cannot have a metaphysical basis.

Can this conclusion be avoided? If we reason similarly to Mackie's, we must prove that causality in nature is not necessary before we assert that things yet to be explained by laws of nature have supernatural causes. This task demands more than just being able to conceive of something in nature in ways we have never seen before (like a person walking on water). We have to admit that it is an incredibly difficult task. But even if we somehow manage to do this, a more difficult task awaits us. In a contingent nature, the event in question must be proven to be supernatural. How can it be argued that an event is based on causes beyond nature when nature is not

<sup>20</sup> David Hume, *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*, ed. Eric Steinberg (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1977), 47.

necessary? Here we are faced with a conceptual puzzle. Even if we were to explain the regularity in nature, in the way al-Ghazālī did, by habit, no event would be supernatural. Therefore, if causality in nature is not necessary, extraordinary events such as miracles cannot even be claimed to be supernatural.

### 3.3. Appealing to the Principle of Sufficient Reason

The second metaphysical explanation offered for extraordinary events arises from the principle of sufficient reason. The principle of sufficient reason is the idea that everything that exists must have an adequate explanation or cause. According to this principle, an event is extraordinary if it lacks any explanation or simply has an incomprehensible or mysterious explanation. Although it is accepted that events transcend nature in this way, causality is not actually suspended. This means that an extraordinary event is actually against an epistemic integrity that we know as nature. This will reveal the inadequacy of our knowledge of nature if the event actually occurs. An extraordinary event is thus metaphysically inseparable from a normal event. By adhering to the principle of sufficient reason, more information is gained about metaphysical nature.

In modern philosophy, the principle of sufficient reason is associated with the rationalist philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, who argued that everything that exists must have a sufficient cause, which can be explained in terms of its nature or its relation to other things. Leibniz defends this principle in several of his works, including his *Monadology* and *Discourse on Metaphysics*. In his *Monadology*, Leibniz argues that everything in the universe is made up of indivisible units called monads, self-contained substances that are closed, have their nature, and can only interact with other monads through pre-established harmony.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the existence and actions of monads must be explained by the principle of sufficient reason, that there must be a reason why each monad is unique and interacts with other monads in this way. Leibniz, again in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, argues that the principle of sufficient reason is a necessary condition for knowledge and understanding. Knowledge requires, he argues, that we be able to explain why things are the way they are, and that the principle of sufficient reason provides a way of doing this by showing that everything that exists or happens always has a cause or justification.<sup>22</sup>

Leibniz did not use the concept of the extraordinary in the sense we use it today. According to him, the only an extraordinary event that can be evaluated as supernatural is the creation of the universe.<sup>23</sup> The principle of sufficient reason, however, has a different relation to the concept of the extraordinary. From the Leibnizian point of view, a miracle or spontaneous event that seems to have no apparent cause can be considered extraordinary. But since the principle of sufficient reason implies that everything happening must have an explanation or cause, there is no truly extraordinary event in the sense of events that have no explanation or cause.<sup>24</sup> A law that we consider violated can only be a subordinate maxim. Even events that seem to suspend regularity “conform to the universal law of the general order.”<sup>25</sup> This means that we may view some events as extraordinary because we do not have the knowledge or understanding to fully explain them.

<sup>21</sup> Lloyd Strickland, *Leibniz's Monadology* (Edinburgh University Press, 2014) , 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Leibniz: Discourse on Metaphysics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020) , 110-111.

<sup>23</sup> Strickland, *Leibniz's Monadology*, 52.

<sup>24</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Leibniz: Discourse*, 127.

<sup>25</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Leibniz: Discourse*, 124.

Ibn Sîna has an important place among those who apply the principle of sufficient reason in metaphysical explanations.<sup>26</sup> According to Ibn Sîna, who explains everything in existence with a modal metaphysical (necessary, possible, and impossible) system, God as the First Being necessitates that the existence of everything depends on another cause, except God himself. He is the Cause of Causes. He points out that there are compelling reasons for every event that takes place, and that the consequences emerging from individual events cannot be otherwise. In this case, everything in nature occurs through the necessary interaction between essences. In Ibn Sina's modal metaphysics, the principle of causality answers the question of how God creates nature.<sup>27</sup> Nothing can come into existence without a sufficient cause and remains only as a "possible in itself."

Ibn Sina's understanding of the extraordinary was also shaped within this framework. He embraces the first basic assumption for extraordinary events while rejecting the second. However, he firmly holds the third. In this respect, an extraordinary event can happen in accordance with the knowledge of God, who is the final and effective sufficient cause of nature. But the same is true for ordinary events. This means that both types of events occur by causality since they are made "necessary" by the knowledge of God. For an extraordinary event, we cannot say that the causes are supernatural, but that we simply do not know the causes. Ibn Sîna argues that the seeming randomness and unpredictability of events in the world stem from our limited understanding of the underlying causes and principles that govern them. According to him, if we had perfect knowledge of the world, including nature and spirit, we could explain every event according to its causes and justifications, and nothing would seem extraordinary to us. It is understood from this that an extraordinary event as the violation of laws of nature has no place in Ibn Sîna's metaphysics because nature is explained by metaphysical necessity. Thus, Ibn Sîna considers epistemological explanation sufficient for extraordinary events.<sup>28</sup> However, Ibn Sîna thinks that extraordinary events can happen within nature. Considering Ibn Sîna's view on nature is not only material but also spiritual, he admits non-material causation into the picture. According to him, the higher powers of the human spirit can act on matter in various ways, causing objects to take on previously unknown forms. In other words, extraordinary events actually show the metaphysical power of the soul over nature.<sup>29</sup> However, this activity of the soul is not metaphysically different from man's effect on his own body and other objects throughout his body. Hence, he firmly acknowledges the assumption of correspondence. The mind does not just correspond to the world but also is an active power in nature.

It is obvious that Ibn Sîna explains extraordinary events epistemologically because the revelation of a soul's power that was not known before is already among the metaphysically possible events. Although it costs Ibn Sîna a metaphysical criterion for distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary events, his strong appeal to the powers of the human soul not only admits extraordinary events in his metaphysics but also provides us with an epistemological criterion. It is an extraordinary event if its causes are unknown.

In a nutshell, although Ibn Sîna also acknowledged the possibility of miracles that could be considered extraordinary in terms of events that seem to violate the laws of nature, he argued

<sup>26</sup> Kara Richardson, "Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Review of Metaphysics* 67/4 (2014), 743–768.

<sup>27</sup> Avicenna, *Ibn Sina's Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics: An Analysis and Annotated Translation*, trans. Shams Constantine Inati (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 492–494.

<sup>28</sup> Catarina Carriço Marques de Moura Belo, *Chance and Determinism in Avicenna and Averroës* (Leiden: BRILL, 2007), 89.

<sup>29</sup> Yasin R. Başaran, "Avicenna on the Soul's Power to Manipulate Material Objects," *Eskiyeni* 30 (2015), 145–157.

that even miracles must have a sufficient reason or justification that could be related to God's will or some other divine principle. Therefore, Ibn Sînâ's account does not allow beyond an epistemological explanation for an extraordinary event by expanding the definition of nature to encompass a greater range of metaphysically possible events.

We see that Ibn Sînâ and Leibniz jointly examined nature with the principle of sufficient reason, and as a result, they reached an understanding of nature in which causality is necessary. For both, nature has a divine and immutable structure that contains the metaphysical causes of objects and events. For them, nature has a divine aspect because the principle of sufficient cause of the nature is God's creation. Nature is also immutable. Because according to Ibn Sînâ God's knowledge<sup>30</sup> and according to Leibniz His will<sup>31</sup> necessitate everything in nature that exists as it is. In this sense, it is out of the question for objects that have causal connections in nature to take part in an event contrary to their essential qualities. Extraordinary events such as miracles, according to them, are due to the limitedness of our knowledge. Consequently, according to both, an extraordinary event is metaphysically inseparable from an ordinary event. What distinguishes the two kinds of events is our limited knowledge of necessary causes.

How does the principle of sufficient reason enable this epistemological explanation of extraordinary events? If according to Ibn Sînâ or Leibniz, the principle of causality in nature was contingent rather than necessary, then they would join those who understand extraordinary events as supernatural in the conceptual puzzle. If causality were contingent, no event could be said to violate causality because there is no metaphysical criterion to distinguish regular events in nature from supernatural ones. How can God's intervention in nature by violating causality be separated metaphysically from God's creation of causality? Ibn Sînâ and Leibniz, accepting the absence of such a metaphysical criterion, went on to offer an epistemological explanation for extraordinary events. Using the principle of sufficient reason, they were able to define nature as a whole and thus emphasized that events that can be seen as supernatural actually happen in the causal order of nature. This is a very strong emphasis that shows that there can be an epistemological rather than a metaphysical explanation for extraordinary events. Rather than understanding the extraordinary as supernatural, Ibn Sîna and Leibniz explain extraordinary events within the limits of causality in nature.

## Conclusion

In this article, I have examined two metaphysical explanations for the possibility of extraordinary events. Based on three metaphysical assumptions, I discuss the ideas of Richard Swinburne, al-Ghazālî, and Nazif Muhtaroglu who defends identifying extraordinary events as supernatural. Meanwhile, making use of J. L. Mackie and David Hume, my criticisms of them focus on the fact that it is unclear what is meant by the supernatural since no criterion can be presented to separate the supernatural from the natural. My discussion points out that it is difficult to maintain an understanding of the supernatural without assuming nature and the principle of causality. I also argue that extraordinary events can be explained more strongly by appealing to the principle of sufficient reason by which laws of nature are necessary and causality is not violated. Although Ibn Sînâ and Leibniz fail to offer metaphysical criteria too, they position nature in a

<sup>30</sup> Michael E. Marmura, "Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82/3 (1962), 303.

<sup>31</sup> Rodriguez-Pereyra, *Leibniz: Discourse*, 17-18.

solid place in their metaphysics that extraordinary events find a stronger epistemological support.

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