# KELVIN, COX, PHYSICS AND MIRACLES

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What, if anything, does a new opening in physics tell us about God's activity in the world?
**Category:** Observations

One of the things that I remember from my physics A Level, forty-five years ago is a quote from the eminent nineteenth century scientist, Lord Kelvin.

> *Â There is nothing new to be discovered in physics now. All that remains is more and more precise measurement.*

We were taught this quote because it was hilariously wrong. Within a few years of this statement being made, the discovery of radioactivity and quantum mechanics opened up a whole new world of non-Newtonian physics. The only problem is that Kelvin never said it.

That being said, in the years since I left school, physics has been going through a bit of a pseudo-Kelvin moment. Using more and complex machinery, physicists are making ever more detailed measurements both on the massive astronomical scale and of increasingly small particles, as they search to tie everything into a "theory of everything". While they probably wouldn't fall into the hubris of the quote falsely attributed to Kelvin, there has been a sense that physics has pretty much got the world all tied up.

I'm a big admirer of science communicator and physicist Brian Cox. On a number of occasions I've heard him say that things like miracles and life after death are impossible because they would break the laws of physics and require a force that we are currently unaware of. The implication, is that we know all that we need to know and that all we have to sort out are the details of how it all fits together and what we know excludes miracles, *ergo* there are no miracles.

However, this is somewhat up for grabs with recent discoveries of forces acting on fundamental particles which may imply that there is a yet undiscovered force of nature. Our standard model of physics may be broken. You can read about it here, or if you want something more technical, try this link.

So does this new force of nature mean that miracles exist after all? Sorry, no it doesn't. There is a lot of work to sort out what the results of these experiments mean and it will be a long time before anyone can say anything very definite about them. However, I'd be very surprised if they had any relevance to the concept of miracles or life after death.

What this discovery does mean is that we need to be very cautious about ever claiming that we

understand everything. There will always be gaps in our knowledge. The advances in physics over the last century are amazing. Our understanding has come on leaps and bounds and as a result, it is getting harder and harder to discover fundamentally new things about our universe. As a Christian, I think this is wonderful. However, it's always worth bearing in mind Hamlet's words

> *There areÂ moreÂ things inÂ heaven and earth,Â Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.*

While Shakespeare wasn't a scientist, he did grasp something about the limits of human knowledge. To be honest, I haven't a clue how God works miracles and gives us eternal life. Perhaps he suspends the laws of physics, perhaps he bends them or maybe there is some force that we have yet to discover that he uses. It is possible that one day we'll understand enough about physics to get an insight into what he is doing and how he does it - but we probably aren't there yet.

This new discovery expands the limits of our understanding, but it also reminds us that there are limits. We don't know everything and we would do well to recognise that.