Can a scientist believe in the resurrection?
Three hypotheses.

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I’m a professor of nuclear science and engineering at MIT, and today, I am celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. So are dozens of my colleagues. How can this be?

Hypothesis one: We’re not talking about a literal resurrection. Easter of 2016, on the first published We really believe in the bodily resurrection of the humans don’t rise from the dead. People knew that perfectly well in the first century; just as they knew that the blind from birth don’t as adults regain their sight, or water doesn’t instantly turn into wine.

Maybe science has made the world seem more comprehensible – although in some respects it seems more wonderful and mysterious. Maybe superstition was more widespread in the first century than it is today – although the dreams of today’s sports fans and the widespread interest in the astrology pages sometimes make me wonder. Maybe people were more open then to the possibility of miracles than we are today. Still, the fact that the resurrection was impossible in the normal course of events was as obvious in the first century as it is for us. Indeed that is why it was seen as a great demonstration of God’s power.

To be sure, while science can’t logically rule miracles in or out of consideration, it can be a helpful tool for investigating contemporary miraculous claims. It may be able to reveal self-deception, trickery, or misperception. If someone has been seen levitating on a supposed flying carpet in their living room, then the discovery of powerful electromagnets in their basement might render such claims implausible. But if science fails to find defeating evidence then it is unable to say one way or the other whether some reported inexplicable event happened, or to prove that it is miraculous. Science offers natural explanations of natural events. It has no power or need to assert that only natural events happen.

Today’s widespread materialist view that events contrary to the laws of science just can’t happen is a metaphysical doctrine, not a scientific fact. What’s more, the doctrine that the laws of nature are “inviolable” is not necessary for science to function. Science offers natural explanations of natural events. It has no power or need to assert that only natural events happen.

So if science is not able to adjudicate whether Jesus’ resurrection happened or not, are we completely unable to assess the plausibility of the claim? No. Contrary to increasingly popular opinion, science is not our only means for accessing truth. In the case of Jesus’ resurrection, we must consider the historical evidence, and the historical evidence for the resurrection is as good as for almost any event of ancient history. The extraordinary character of the event, and its significance, provide a unique context, and ancient history is necessarily hard to establish. But a bare presumption that science has shown the resurrection to be impossible is an intellectual cop-out. Science shows no such thing.

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Hypothesis three: I was brainwashed as a child. If you've read this far and you are still wondering how an MIT professor could seriously believe in the resurrection, you might guess I was brainwashed to believe it as a child. But no, I did not grow up in a home where I was taught to believe in the resurrection. I came to faith in Jesus when I was an undergraduate at Cambridge University and was baptized in the chapel of Kings College on my 20th birthday. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are as compelling to me now as then.

References
Ian Hutchinson, Can a scientist believe in miracles?, 2018.