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## Wonderment and delight : an outline of the phenomenology of the miracle as an extraordinary event

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Studia Philosophiae Christianae 48/2, 123-141

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2012

Artykuł został opracowany do udostępnienia w internecie przez Muzeum Historii Polski w ramach prac podejmowanych na rzecz zapewnienia otwartego, powszechnego i trwałego dostępu do polskiego dorobku naukowego i kulturalnego. Artykuł jest umieszczony w kolekcji cyfrowej [bazhum.muzhp.pl](http://bazhum.muzhp.pl), gromadzącej zawartość polskich czasopism humanistycznych i społecznych.

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## WONDERMENT AND DELIGHT. AN OUTLINE OF THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE MIRACLE AS AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT

What is not miraculous when first it comes to knowledge?  
How many things are judged impossible before they occur?  
Truly the power and majesty of the nature of things is constantly  
unbelievable  
if one grasps only part of it in the mind and not the whole.<sup>1</sup>

**Key words:** miracle, extraordinary event, wonderment, delight

1. Introduction. 2. The miracle as an extraordinary event (1) – wonderment.  
3. The miracle as an extraordinary event (2) – delight. 4. Wonderment and delight – the  
starting point for further reflection on the concept of miracle.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The term ‘miracle’, when used by ordinary people, who do not bother themselves to make it precise, may describe a wide range of events or things<sup>2</sup>. Sometimes, it is used simply to talk about some unexpected situation, e.g. when someone passes a difficult exam unex-

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<sup>1</sup> Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* (Latin: *Naturalis Historiae*), Book 7, Chapter 1 – *The Elder Pliny on the Human Animal: Natural History, Book 7* (Clarendon Ancient History Series), transl. M. Beagon, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005, 59.

<sup>2</sup> “I often meet people who say: ‘For me, each flower, bee and child is a miracle’. Aren’t they right? Isn’t it a miracle that someone is able to run as fast as a squirrel at the age of 105? Is not a miracle anything, which can surprise us? Even a snow flake?” (K. Berger, *Darf man an Wunder glauben?*, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh 1999, 53-54).

pectedly (“It is a miracle that I passed!”); or about the sudden change of someone’s behaviour (“That’s a miracle! He stopped drinking!”). If something happened ‘by miracle’, it means that it happened because of a favourable coincidence of circumstances. Sometimes, the effect of science and technology development may also be called a miracle (‘a marvellous invention’); or an outstanding work of art (‘wonderful music’)<sup>3</sup>. There are also other popular phrases, using some sense of the word ‘miracle’: wonder diet, marvellous woman, faith works wonders, child prodigy, and so on. The authors of such statements are usually conscious that they use the words ‘miracle’ and ‘miraculous/marvellous’ in the metaphorical or even poetic sense. In such cases, the word ‘miracle’ becomes synonymous with the words ‘happiness’, ‘beauty’, or ‘good luck’, ‘success’; then it denotes the event or object, which, for the author of the statement, is of particularly positive significance<sup>4</sup>.

The term ‘miracle’ is used in another, narrower sense, when we talk about the events, the extraordinariness of which follows from the fact that they are inconsistent with our knowledge of the world and the regularities present in it (e.g. surviving a plane crash, when the plane crashes into the sea from an altitude of a few thousand metres<sup>5</sup>; recovering from the last stages of cancer<sup>6</sup>; being rescued from a tragic earthquake<sup>7</sup>). In such cases, people using the word miracle, express, in

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<sup>3</sup> R. Swinburne calls the utterances of this type ‘the secondary understanding of a miracle’. See: R. Swinburne, *The Concept of Miracle*, Macmillan – St Martin’s Press, London 1970, 10. P. Tillich, in turn, refuses to call such events miracles; this is due to the fact that they lack any signs of religious experience. See: P. Tillich, *Revelation and Miracle*, in: *Miracles*, ed. R. Swinburne, Macmillan, New York – London 1989, 71.

<sup>4</sup> In this sense, the word ‘miracle’ may also be used by an atheist, as it is deprived of its religious connotation. See: M. H. Barnes, *Understanding Religion and Science. Introducing the Debate*, Continuum, London – New York 2010, 109. This author provides his own classification of various senses of the term ‘miracle’. See thereof, 110-111.

<sup>5</sup> E.g. The case of 14-year old Baya Bakari, who survived a plane crash near the Comoros Islands on the 30<sup>th</sup> of June 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. examples of healings presented in: B. Steiger, S. H. Steiger, *Miracles of Healing: Inspirational Stories of Amazing Recovery*, Adams Media Corporation 2004.

<sup>7</sup> See as examples the stories of people, who survived a tragic earthquake in Haiti

particular, their own surprise at the course of some event, as the course of this event differs significantly from their reasonable expectations, based on their knowledge which stems from their life experiences and from their observations of the way the world functions<sup>8</sup>. Yet, after some deeper reflection, they conclude that there are no significant reasons for not classifying an event as theoretically possible to be explained by specialists in a given science. Thus, the word ‘miracle’ is used here as a synonym for ‘extremely low probability’ of a given situation<sup>9</sup>. That, which happened is seen as not very probable, but not as impossible.

Yet, most frequently, the term ‘miracle’ is used in the religious sense of the word<sup>10</sup>. It means that calling an event a miracle contains in itself not only the declaration that it is an extraordinary-unexpected or extraordinary-improbable one, but also the result of a direct or indirect act of God. It’s the very religious (theological) sense of the term ‘miracle’ that is still a matter of philosophical and theological debate<sup>11</sup>.

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in 2010: J. Hunter, *Healings, Miracles, and Supernatural Experiences*, Destiny Image 2010.

<sup>8</sup> See: D. Basinger, *What is Miracle?*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Miracles*, ed. G. H. Twelftree, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2011, 19.

<sup>9</sup> I. Pyysiäinen suggests that miracles of such a kind should be described as “the miracles in the weak sense” of the word. These are events, which contradict our intuitive expectations towards reality. While the miracle “in the strong sense of the word” is, in his opinion, a theological notion, connected with religious experience and an attitude of religious faith. See: I. Pyysiäinen, *Mind and Miracles*, *Zygon. Journal of Religion and Science* 37(2002)3, 735-737.

<sup>10</sup> In this case, there is also a great variety of events, which are called miracles. See as an example: G. Ashe, *Miracles*, Routledge – Kegan Paul, London – Oxon 1978; J. Nickell, *Looking for a Miracle: Weeping Icons, Relics, Stigmata, Visions and Healing Cures*, Prometheus Books, Amherst 1993; A. Englisch, *Gottes spuren. Die Wunder der katholischen Kirche*, C. Bertelsmann Verlag, München 2006.

<sup>11</sup> On the subject of the variety of these discussions see for example: J. H. Diemer, *Nature Miracle*, transl. W. Bouma, Wedge Publishing Foundation, Toronto 1977; D. S. Rogo, *Miracles: A Parascientific Inquiry into Wondrous Phenomena*, The Dial Press, New York 1982; W. L. Craig, *The Problem of Miracles: A Historical and Philosophical Perspective*, in: *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 6: *The Miracles of Jesus*, ed. D. Wenham, C. Blomberg, JSOT Press, Sheffield 1986, 9-48; A. W. J. Harper, *Studies in the Interrelationship between Miracles and the Laws of Nature*, Mellen Research Uni-

There are two fundamental meanings of the word ‘miracle’: (1) the phenomenon, which, according to religious beliefs, doesn’t follow the laws of nature, but it can be explained only through God’s intervention; the supernatural phenomenon, indicating God’s intervention, and (2) the unique, extraordinary thing, the extremely beautiful thing, causing astonishment and admiration; the event, phenomenon, which is extraordinary, unbelievable, difficult or impossible to explain, causing astonishment and admiration<sup>12</sup>. The first of the two meanings of the word ‘miracle’ just mentioned, refers to its religious sense, while the second one may be described as the non-religious sense of the term in question, i.e. the one, which takes into account neither God and God’s intervention, nor the religious character of the event<sup>13</sup>. In both definitions of the word ‘miracle’ we have numerous designations and meanings, which require more thorough examination<sup>14</sup>. It’s also the case with the dictionary definitions of the notion of ‘miracle’. Numerous and not always precisely defined expressions, such as: the phenomenon “extraordinary”, “exceptional”, “transcendental”, “unexplained”, “inexplicable”, “exceeding the powers and abilities of nature”, and so

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versity Press, San Francisco 1993; R. B. Mullin, *Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London 1996; *Questions of Miracle*, ed. R. A. Larmer, McGill, Queen’s University Press, Montreal – Kingston – London – Buffalo 1996; N. L. Geisler, *Miracles and the Modern Mind. A Defense of Biblical Miracles*, Wipf and Stock, Eugene 2004; M. Corner, *Signs of God. Miracles and their Interpretation*, Ashgate, Aldershot – Burlington 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Miracle*, in: *Longman Dictionary of the Contemporary English*, Longman, Harlow 2000, 909.

<sup>13</sup> Probably it would be useful to distinguish between ‘miracles’ and ‘marvels’, ‘wonders’. Then ‘miracles’ (Latin: *miraculorum*) would mean miraculous events, religious in character, while ‘marvels’, or ‘wonders’ (Latin: *mirabilia*) – miraculous events, non-religious in character (extraordinary or strange).

<sup>14</sup> The non-religious sense of the term ‘miracle’ could be ignored because of its casual, imprecise and too broad usage. It seems, however, that the characteristics attributed to the miracle in its non-religious sense are also present in a religious one, although they do not play a crucial role. So they will be taken into account, when we try to explain in greater detail the sense of the term ‘miracle’ and the phenomenology of the miraculous event.

on, raise a wide range of problems concerning the understanding of the miracle.

When seeking to define what a miracle is, we should start with the clear presentation of the fundamental content, most philosophers and theologians attribute to this notion<sup>15</sup>. Despite some discrepancies between the definitions of the miracle, the literature suggests, they do have some elements in common. These are the fundamental, crucial and necessary elements of the notion in question. These common elements are calling the miracle the extraordinary event and the one caused by God. Thus, in brief, the miracle is defined as “an unusual event caused by a god”<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, we should start by defining the extraordinariness of the miracle.

## 2. THE MIRACLE AS AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT (1) – WONDERMENT

The miracle is the event, i.e. the phenomenon or group of phenomena, constituting a whole and taking place at a given time and in a given place. It means that the miracle may be treated as a natural, empirical phenomenon, too, as it can be observed and recorded in exactly the same way as other facts and events are. Yet, the miracle is kind of privileged with respect to other events, as, due to its extraordinariness, it raises human interest and attracts more attention to itself. “In the broadest sense, the miracle is the event, which raises the amazement. So, it has to be extraordinary, unusual and contradictory to our expectations in some way”<sup>17</sup>. Defining the miracle as an ‘extraordinary

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<sup>15</sup> A concise historical review of various ways the miracle was understood may be found in: J. Pawlikowski, *The History of Thinking About Miracles in the West*, South-eastern Medical Journal 100(2007)12, 1229-1235.

<sup>16</sup> See: D. Basinger, R. Basinger, *Philosophy and Miracle. The Contemporary Debate*, (*Problems in Contemporary Philosophy*, vol. 2), The Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston – Queenston 1986, 3.

<sup>17</sup> J. Pawlikowski, *Dotyk Boga czy siła natury? Pojęcie cudu w perspektywie historyczno-filozoficznej*, in: *Opieka paliatywna nad dziećmi*, vol. 17, ed. T. Dangel, Warszawskie Hospicjum dla Dzieci, Warszawa 2009, 35.

event' means, first of all, putting it in opposition and confronting it intuitively with ordinary events. In order for one to be able to perceive a characteristic such as extraordinariness, one has to be conscious of that, which is ordinary. Thus, one has to have enough experience of the things, which happen in an ordinary, typical way. Typicality and commonness may, therefore, be treated as a necessary background, without which there would be no human reaction to being new and different. How could miracles amaze us, if we expected them? And how may there be exceptions, if we do not know the rules? If, at any time, there existed people, who didn't know the laws of nature at all, they wouldn't know what a miracle is and they wouldn't be interested in it, even if they saw it with their own eyes. Nothing can be extraordinary, if we do not know what is ordinary. If someone hasn't noticed that the sun rises in the East, they wouldn't see anything miraculous if, one morning, it were to rise in the West<sup>18</sup>. Calling an event "ordinary", "usual", "normal" means that we see nothing special and important in it, nothing, which could surprise or amaze us, which could make us reflect upon it more deeply. That's why we may say that the vast majority of events, we experience during our lives, belongs to the group of the ordinary ones. Nevertheless, sometimes something happens, something, which amazes us, because it is a kind of exception to the ordinary, normal and expected course of events<sup>19</sup>. The events of this type surpass our average experiences and they are recognized as some special cases.

Distinguishing the definition of the miracle as an extraordinary event finds its justification in casual statements, made by people, who talk, e.g. about a wide panorama of mountains ('What a marvellous view'), about an unexpected meeting with someone ('It's a miracle that I met you'), or directly about another person ('My child is wonderful')<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles. A Preliminary Study*, Geoffrey Bles, London 1952, 78-79.

<sup>19</sup> See: M. Planck, *Scientific Autobiography and Other Papers*, transl. F. Gaynor, Philosophical Library, New York 1949, 93.

<sup>20</sup> According to this meaning of 'miracle' each summer flower and each winter snowflake is able to awaken in us the sense of a miracle, which is our response to the

The character of the statements just mentioned points to at least two elements present in them: (1) the wonderment resulting from an unexpected course of an event (the mountain landscape appearing suddenly from behind the wood; meeting a friend unexpectedly in a foreign town; or a child surprisingly showing their intelligence by their mature behaviour); and (2) the delight, an emotional state resulting from encountering certain circumstances, which are lofty in character (the grandeur of mountains against a sunset; establishing a close relationship with a person or the wisdom of the decision your child made, and so on)<sup>21</sup>.

A closer analysis of the two characteristics of the miracle understood as an ‘extraordinary event’, (although the examples just quoted are not religious events), enables the more thorough and precise definition of the concept of the miracle. This seems still more useful, because the two elements just mentioned (wonderment and delight) are also present in the religious sense of the miracle, in which they refer to certain situations, in which an act of God can be seen. Especially in Biblical stories, miracles are presented as extraordinary events, facts raising amazement, wonderment and fear because of the power and might of God manifested in them<sup>22</sup>. The characteristics of the two ele-

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loftiness. Cf. A. J. Heschel, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 1955, 54f).

<sup>21</sup> The etymology of the word ‘miracle’ also leads us to the distinction just made – Latin: *miraculum*. It means the object of admiration and amazement; something extraordinary, amazing and admirable at the same time. *Miraculum* – admiration, miracle, the object of miracle. Cf. *mirabilis* – strange, extraordinary, amazing, peculiar, weird. Both terms come from the same stem *mirror*; *mirari* – to be astonished, surprised, amazed, delighted, to adore and admire. See: F. R. Tennant, *Miracles and Its Philosophical Presuppositions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1925, 41, 47-49, 60-62).

<sup>22</sup> Wonderment and delight are typical reactions to the miracles performed by Jesus Christ. In his Gospel, St Mark puts great emphasis on the fact that the extraordinary deeds of Jesus greatly impressed men and women around Him; His miracles raised their admiration, delight as well as wonderment and fear. See: M. E. Glasswell, *The Use of Miracles in the Markan Gospel*, in: *Miracles. Cambridge Studies in Their Philosophy and History*, ed. C. F. D. Moule, A. R. Mowbray, London 1965, 149-162; M.



ments mentioned, as they are present in the non-religious sense of the miracle, allow us to see a lot of their shades and then to define the miracle as an extraordinary event more precisely and accurately. Yet, we should note at the same time that both elements of the extraordinariness of miraculous event, i.e. the wonderment and delight, (although necessary to characterize the religious sense of the miracle) are not sufficient to talk about the miracle in the religious sense, when taken separately from other elements.

We experience unexpected things and situations many times in our lives. When we use our ability to predict, and the knowledge of the world we have collected so far, and we encounter something unexpected, we are amazed. The thing, we are almost certain, the one, which we expect with great certainty, doesn't happen and the one, which actually happens, is opposed to our predictions and expectations. Not only can situations and objects amaze us, but people too. Moreover, we are able to surprise ourselves. Although we may have acted many times in a certain, typical way, once a minor change in our lives occurs we may act in a completely different way. Also, we may be amazed by something, which no one expected at all. A fact, situation, event, or a piece of news may appear in our lives suddenly and astonish us, move us and sometimes even shock and terrify us.

The question about the cause of this astonishment seems very important. It leads towards the issues of the intentionality of human emotions and enduring certain experiences. The impulse, i.e. the amazement opens a man cognitively. It allows one to concentrate not just on the content itself, which, especially at the very beginning may be impossible to capture intellectually, but also on the quality of this content. The content itself appears to be strange and paradoxical, sometimes weird and contradicting our intuition<sup>23</sup>. The paradox, in turn, amazes

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R. D'Angelo, *Gender and Power in Gospel of Mark: The Daughter of Jairus and the Woman with the Flow of Blood*, in: *Miracles in Jewish and Christian Antiquity. Imagining Truth*, ed. J. C. Cavadini, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame 1999, 83-110.

<sup>23</sup> The emotion, which starts with surprise at paradoxicality, may be a direct reaction to the significance and value. People are able to express in a secondary way the theme

us, and quite often, it makes us anxious and ‘torments’ us. The astonishment is something more than just the feeling of amazement or surprise. It denotes the state of feeling great surprise for some reason<sup>24</sup>. If something or someone ‘astonishes us’, it means that we recognize that something important happened and that we feel obliged, in a way, to reflect upon the situation carefully. For example, if we say: “I’m surprised at your behaviour”, we express our disappointment that someone didn’t behave in the way we expected them to. Yet, we regard the situation as generally understandable, although maybe we do not agree with it or disapprove of it. Yet, the statement “I am astonished by his behaviour” contains not only the element of amazement but also the highest degree of incomprehension of the said behaviour; this incomprehension follows from impossibility to explain it immediately (i.e. to indicate the cause or the mechanism, which brought about a given situation). Thus, the wonderment doesn’t allow us to ignore a given fact; it forces us to reflect deeply upon it. In other words, with ordinary surprise we understand what happened, although we are surprised or amazed. In the case of wonderment, however, there appears at least a short period of lack of understanding, which makes us stop and reflect upon the phenomenon, which appears. The wonderment may also be externalized in the form of a cry of astonishment, speechlessness, amazement or embarrassment.

The astonishment at that, which happened, indicates also the unexpected character of the event. If we are astonished, it means that we didn’t expect the situation, which happened and that our expectations differed from the actual state of affairs. The astonishment, therefore, is caused by the fact that we either had different expectations concerning the course of the event or the event surpassed our expectations significantly. The astonishment is, therefore, our spontaneous reaction to that,

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of this emotion; they are able to label the significance and value, to which it opens them up. Thus, an analysis of the miraculous event, understood as an extraordinary one, should follow by considering the question of the significance and sense of the miracle.

<sup>24</sup> Wonderment is a feeling we have when we are totally amazed by something, which we classify as positive.

which appears to us as extraordinary. Within this approach, the carrier of the extraordinariness may be both the things, which are extremely rare, exceptional or improbable and those, which are usual and typical. The extraordinariness, understood in this way, depends on the subject – what astonishes one person may make little impression on another<sup>25</sup>.

Thus, the extraordinariness of a miraculous event has to be identified with the absolute wonderment (the highest degree of wonderment) as human attitude towards our personal experiences, historical events and natural phenomena. With the absolute wonderment, one stands facing great, unfathomable and miraculous things. One encounters them in space and time, namely, in history and nature. The miraculousness as the appearance of that, which seems improbable, is the sharpest human experience of extraordinariness. The wonderment in its deepest form is the reaction to extraordinariness, the object of which is that, which we usually assume as situated beyond the possible things. Hence, the miracle defined as an ‘extraordinary event’ is, first of all, the event, which deeply astonishes the person experiencing it<sup>26</sup>. It seems impossible, yet it happens. Impossible, but accomplished, absurdly improbable, but real, contradicting our deepest convictions, common sense, logic rules of the world, but genuine. The element of wonderment results from the amazing character of the event, but, at the same time, it is connected with the feeling of incomprehension of the actual state of affairs. The wonderment, in its strongest form, is the reaction to the extraordinariness, which is the miraculousness. The more unexpected and incomprehensible the course of an event turns out to be, the greater the wonderment is. When one has a sense of extraordinariness and of

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<sup>25</sup> The source of the differences between the reactions of various people to the same event may lie in the amount of their knowledge of the world, in different life experiences, in varying sensitivity, depending on one’s character, personality, and so on.

<sup>26</sup> “(...) the most general characterization of a miracle is as an event that provokes wonder. As such, it must be in some way extraordinary, unusual, or contrary to our expectations. Disagreement arises, however, as to what makes a miracle something worth wondering about” (D. Corner, *Miracles (The Definition of ‘Miracle’)*, in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/miracles/#H1>; accessed: 30.09.2012).

the mystery connected with it, the world seems to be unbelievable and contradicting any reasonable expectations. Even the very human ability to experience extraordinariness raises a sense of wonderment in us.

We should note at this point that wonderment is not the reaction to a ‘cheap sensation’ or interesting piece of news and its object is not just the uniqueness of the event. We can look for the sensational and interesting news deliberately, while wonderment comes up unexpectedly and suddenly. It is impossible to search for that, which astonishes us, as it appears beyond our control and often even contrary to our attitudes. That’s why the object of wonderment is that, which is extraordinary but real and genuine at the same time, that, which actually is. For instance, only true wisdom, visible in one’s extremely accurate statement, the genuine surgeon’s skill to use his surgical equipment, or the genuine musician’s skill at making an instrument play perfectly – only these things may raise wonderment. We experience the greatest wonderment at the things, which are true, actual and real. Due to this fact, wonderment helps us accept the authenticity of the miraculousness.

However, wonderment alone is not sufficient for anyone to call a given fact a miracle, even in the non-religious sense. Wonderment requires that a human consciousness attempts to clarify it and is coupled with delight, which is the second, complementary element of the miracle understood as an unusual event.

### **3. THE MIRACLE AS AN EXTRAORDINARY EVENT (2) – DELIGHT**

Delight is a feeling, very closely connected with the category of beauty. This is the sense of great admiration, esteem of someone or something, of some features or someone’s virtues, connected with emotional exultation<sup>27</sup>. Thus, we are delighted with the things, we regard to be beautiful, according to the criteria of beauty we adopted<sup>28</sup>. In

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<sup>27</sup> Delight is a state, which we experience when we like something very much or we are enchanted by it.

<sup>28</sup> Beauty is not limited just to aesthetic values; it is not connected with the set of

this sense, various things may be regarded as beautiful, e.g.: a mountain landscape, the closeness of another person, a poet's statement, etc. We may be delighted with someone's kindness, a work of architecture, the object of religious knowledge and the result of mathematical calculations. Delight may be also associated with intellectual experience. Numerous scientists have said that they had been delighted with the results of their research in the form of physical theories and mathematical equations, which uncovered the structure of nature for them<sup>29</sup>. In this case, delight means the feeling connected with comprehension by one's mind and sometimes understanding some part of reality.

The 'entrance hall' to delight is admiration<sup>30</sup>. It appears not only with respect to aesthetic values or moral attitudes but also within the scope of rational knowledge. Admiration may be regarded as a form of reaction to a certain quality connected with human knowledge. We react with admiration to the things, which appear to us as enormous, vast and multiple. It is a human reaction, which involves 'fastening one's look' on something, 'being enchanted' with something<sup>31</sup>. The result of adopting such an attitude is the very delight, which generates in a per-

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beings, which raise positive aesthetic experiences. As a transcendental notion, beauty may be attributed to everything that is. Each being, simply through their own existence, is beautiful in their own way.

<sup>29</sup> There is probably no good mathematician or theoretical physicist in the world, who wouldn't be sensitive to a certain kind of beauty, concerning mathematical formulae, procedures and results.

<sup>30</sup> Admiration is the sense of pleasure, with which we look at something we like very much; or the sense of respect and esteem we have for somebody, their achievements, skills, character, etc. Thomas Aquinas derives the Latin word for the miracle (*miraculum*) from the word 'admiration' (*admiratio*). See: Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 103-119: a. 7, q. 3.

<sup>31</sup> This experience seems to be common to all people, so it may be an element of both religious and non-religious conception of the miracle. "The world is our place; heaven – our horizon; eternity – our everyday life; this vision moves me more than the Bible or Koran. It astonishes me more than miracles, if I believed in them. Walking on the surface of the water is nothing in comparison with the Universe!" (A. Comte-Sponville, *L'esprit de l'athéisme: Introduction à une spiritualité sans Dieu*, Albin Michel, Paris 2006, 154).

son the need of staying together with the object of their admiration. The admiration, developing in the human interior, becomes the delight. It is the admiration stored. A person is not only delighted and fascinated, but also desires to stay together with the object of this feeling<sup>32</sup>. The delight may, therefore, be treated as a special case of knowing the values through human emotions. There exists an abundant world of feelings, through which we know all kinds of values: aesthetic, moral. The basic feature of these emotions is the intentionality. It means that they refer us to that, which is external and a man 'is totally absorbed' by the object of delight. This object, in turn, influences the sphere of one's decisions and choices, concerning the establishment of a permanent relationship with a given class of values. Delight may appear both at the moment of understanding a given situation and if the need of explaining the situation fully is not satisfied. Delight, like wonderment, is connected with the sense of loftiness. This loftiness doesn't exist per se, but it follows from experiencing certain situations.

The very fact of experiencing certain situations may raise the sense of loftiness, connected with the object of the experience. The loftiness is also conditioned by the revelation of certain mystery, which grips the human mind. Realizing the presence of the mystery and then the attempt to fathom it are the challenge for the human mind and may turn out to be a fascinating intellectual adventure. Thus, delight should be understood as the attitude adopted when one becomes aware of the mystery connected with the event which has happened. Because one's mind is unable to capture the mystery, it seems fascinating and it provokes the taking up of the challenge connected with it. Then, the delight may change into the contemplation, which means carefully remaining in front of the mystery and, in a way, adoring it. Thus, contemplation becomes the form of relishing that which we have a chance to commune.

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<sup>32</sup> Some statements with the word 'delight' are worth paying attention to: 'the delight manifested on her/his face', 'she/he went into ecstasy', 'she/he was crazy with delight', 'she/he fainted from delight'. They all contain an element of the highest emotional tension and fascination.

The miracle, understood as an extraordinary phenomenon raises the delight on the part of the person, who faces it. It is the delight with extraordinariness, which remains inscrutable. The person experiencing the delight concentrates on the immediate character of the appearance of the extraordinary event, on its unexpected course and on the mystery concerning its origin. Even if the event is expected and predicted as a possible one when it appears, it surpasses all previous expectations, because it leaves unanswered the natural question about the way of its appearance. It also brings the desire to prolong the state of fascination concerning the event.

Still, we should note that the wonderment and delight, understood as the elements of the extraordinariness of a miraculous event, might be accompanied by a kind of fear, i.e. a special mixture of fear, apprehension and anxiety. The delight and wonderment, together with the mixture just mentioned, become a state of mind, which is filled with its object to such degree, that it cannot devote itself to any other. The wonderment, full of fear and the accompanying 'bewilderment of mind and senses' is closely connected with the extraordinariness of the miraculous event. The anxiety, appearing together with the wonderment and delight, may be regarded as something more than the feeling of fear. It is the way of understanding, the act of the insight into the sense, which is greater than a man. It is the consciousness of the presence of transcendental sense, of a deeper message of reality; it is also a reference to the transcendental sense. The anxiety caused by the extraordinary event may therefore lead to experiencing miraculousness and adopting an attitude of humility, originating from the loftiness, felt in the face of the mystery. The anxiety just mentioned results from the fact that the extraordinary event not only remains inscrutable, as far as the mechanism of its occurrence is concerned, but it also generates an uncertainty concerning the future. If the accepted and established ordinariness of events turns out to be just a part of reality, no one may know what we can expect in the future and how it will influence the lives of individuals and of mankind as a whole. Within the perspective of a present extraordinariness, the future appears potentially still more

extraordinary. Yet, the anxiety stands in opposition to the ordinary fear, because, unlike fear, anxiety doesn't push us away from the object, causing this feeling, but rather it pushes us towards this object. Hence, we can talk about the miracle as an extraordinary event, because, in its observer's opinion, it confirms the existence of the Might, which possesses the abundance impossible to realize for any human power. Thus, this Might influences the events, which directly involve a man in his existence and they apparently seem sufficiently well-known; and because of this fact they turn out to be extraordinary.

#### **4. WONDERMENT AND DELIGHT – THE STARTING POINT FOR FURTHER REFLECTION ON THE CONCEPT OF MIRACLE**

The crucial role in defining precisely the characteristics of the extraordinary event, namely, the wonderment, delight and (sometimes) anxiety, is played by the mysterious element of the event. One reacts to the mysteriousness, which, in its simplest and most typical form is connected with the fact that some aspects of the event are puzzling. The mysterious content of an extraordinary event appears to be unknown, incomprehensible but desired and cognitively tempting at the same time. Without these characteristics, the extraordinary event could become repulsive to us. This is the mysterious incomprehensibility, which attributes to the extraordinary event the feature of epistemic accessibility, perceived by a person as the promise of knowledge. Therefore, the object of each authentic wonderment and delight appears as the mysterious one. This is the very extraordinariness, perceived by a human being, which attributes to the event its special, unique character.

The wonderment and delight are the fundamental cause and source of human desire of knowledge. They lead us to make attempts at discovering the mystery one encounters in one's life experience and at neutralizing the anxiety, which the mystery sometimes carries with itself. The delight stirs our emotions, while the wonderment stimulates our minds. That, which is extraordinary not only 'impresses' us, but also puzzles, inspires and motivates us to take action.



Human beings, willing to understand the extraordinary event, launch the process of rational thinking and try to determine precisely the thing, which delighted and astonished them. Thus, the extraordinary event raises the questions, which require adequate answers. The first one is the question about the cause of the event, its origin and course. It manifests the will to satisfy the need of explaining the event which happened. We usually ask: “How did it happen?”, “Is that possible?” The second one is the question about the purpose, significance, sense and value of the event. It expresses human willingness to understand the fact, which we face and which concerns us directly. We wonder: “What does it mean?” and “Why does it happen?”

The questions just mentioned display two directions of quest, determined by the extraordinary event. We want to know ‘how’ something happened and ‘why’, ‘what it happened for’. We seek to explain the mechanism of the causes, responsible for the extraordinary event; we also want to understand the message it carries in itself. We would like to know not just the ‘label’ of the event, but we want to capture its axiological and existential content. Thus, the extraordinariness of a miraculous event turns out to be the introduction to searching for knowledge and comprehension, since the extraordinariness is the very attribute and element of a miraculous event, which raises the need to explain what happened. Nevertheless, the wonderment and the delight are not finished when we get at least partial knowledge of the event, because its very nature doesn’t provide the answers to the most fundamental questions appearing in the human mind. Explaining ‘how’ is not equal to understanding ‘why’. Even if we manage to find partial answers to the above questions, there still remains the question of the existential attitude to the fact, which occurred. Taking certain attitude towards the event, which happened (accepting or rejecting it), is, to a great extent, conditioned by the degree of comprehending the reasonableness of an extraordinary event.

In the contemporary authors’ opinion, it is not enough to restore the miracle the character of the symbol, but it is also necessary to take into account its existence as an extraordinary phenomenon. This is the way

in which we avoid reducing extraordinariness to extremely subjective feeling, which is not based in that which happens at all. Asking the question about the explanation of the event, we address it to the world outside us and we wait for an answer to emerge from there. Otherwise, there appears the danger of artificial creation of extraordinariness, in that which is not extraordinary at all. Thus, the extraordinariness of the event is its feature, which should be somehow rooted in the very event, in its ontology, although it is closely connected with the human mind and human perception of reality<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, in the case of a miraculous event, we should accept a certain, to some extent objective, base of regarding the event as extraordinary; this base must be something more than just the personal feeling and conviction of a given human being<sup>34</sup>.

Thus, the wonderment, delight and anxiety, which are the reactions to the events described as miraculous, raise the need to decide whether the extraordinariness accompanying the event is just the consequence of being new and exerts on human ignorance, or if it is the objective characteristic of the event. If the extraordinariness of a miraculous event is determined in relation to the function of nature, then it is understood as the supernaturalness of a miraculous event. Yet, when the extraordinariness of the event results from confronting it with our knowledge of nature and its laws, then it means that the event lies beyond the scope of the laws of science (either the ones now in force, or all, which are possible to be formulated). Thus we can talk about momentary inexplicability, or permanent inexplicability of the event. In the first case,

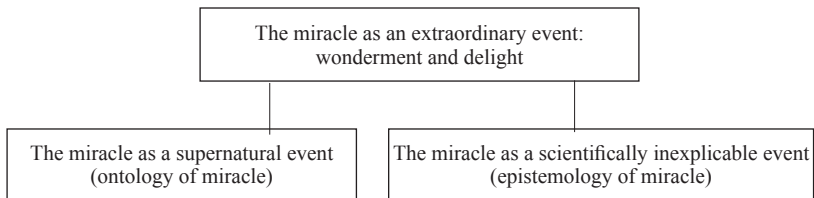
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<sup>33</sup> That's why sometimes we may encounter the distinction between the physical and psychological aspects of a miraculous event. Radical approaches reduce the miracle either merely to the subjective psychological experience or merely to the objective event, which cannot be negotiated with the laws of nature. See: P. Clayton, *God and Contemporary Science*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 1997, 177-183.

<sup>34</sup> The character of an authentic miracle does not involve its rare occurrence, which could be its external criterion; rather, the miracle, as an extraordinary fact, subject to sensory receptors, is not a link in the natural cause-effect chain, hence, it requires an explanation through the reference to the intervention, staying beyond the empirical world.

the miracle is understood as an extraordinary-supernatural event and it is analyzed from the perspective of miracle ontology. In the second case, the miracle is considered within epistemological perspective as an extraordinary-unexplained event and extraordinary-inexplicable event.

On the basis of the above analyses, we have two directions of further consideration concerning defining the miracle as an extraordinary event. The first one determines the problems of ontology of the miracle and shows the issue of understanding the miracle as a supernatural event. The second one, in turn, refers us to the field of epistemology of the miracle, within which we should deal with the problem of its scientific inexplicability (Fig. 1).



## **ZDUMIENIE I ZACHWYT. ZARYS FENOMENOLOGII CUDU JAKO ZDARZENIA NIEZWYKŁEGO**

### Streszczenie

Terminem „cud” posługujemy się, najogólniej rzecz ujmując, wtedy, gdy mówimy o zdarzeniach, które charakteryzują się niezwykłością. Niezwykłość ta oznacza, że dane zdarzenie jawi się nam jako niezgodne z ustalonymi i potwierdzonymi prawidłowościami funkcjonowania świata. Najczęściej „cud” jest rozumiany jako zdarzenie niezwykle, spowodowane przez Boga. Oznacza to, że nazywając jakieś zdarzenie cudem bierzemy pod uwagę nie tylko jego niezwykle charakter, niespodziewaność i nieprawdopodobność wystąpienia, lecz także uznajemy, iż jest ono wynikiem Bożej interwencji. Szczegółowa analiza niezwykłości zdarzenia cudownego prowadzi do wyróżnienia dwóch kolejnych jego cech: ponadnaturalności i naukowej niewyjaśnialności. Z uwagi na to, że cud jest skutkiem działania Boga możemy także mówić o jego religijnym znaczeniu. Bliższa analiza rozumienia ponadnaturalności i naukowej

niewyjaśnialności zdarzenia cudownego powinna także uwzględniać aspekt fenomenologiczny cudu. Ujawniające się w tym aspekcie zdarzenia cudownego przyczyny uznania go za niezwykle: zdumienie i zachwyt, stanowią właściwy punkt wyjścia do zrozumienia niezwyklego charakteru cudu. Zatem fenomenologia zdarzenia cudownego wyznacza dalsze kierunki rozważań filozoficznych na temat natury cudu (ontologia zdarzenia cudownego) oraz możliwości jego rozpoznania (epistemologia zdarzenia cudownego).

**Słowa kluczowe:** cud, zdarzenie niezwykle, zdumienie, zachwyt