

## *A Philosophical Critique of the Concept of Miracle as a “Supernatural Event”*

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*The notion of the supernaturality of an event may be understood in various ways. Most frequently ‘supernatural’ means ‘separated from nature’, i.e. different from nature. Thus, what is meant here is the difference in ontological character. The definitions of miracle, present in literature, emphasize the fact that we may talk about a miracle only when the phenomenon takes place beyond the natural order or stands in opposition to it. The description of a miracle as a ‘supernatural event’ contains in itself the reference to that which is natural. The supernaturality of an event means that it surpasses (transcends) naturality. Additionally, this transcendence contains a kind of opposition to that which is natural. However, the miracle as a supernatural event takes place within the scope of that which is natural, although it takes place in a different way from natural events. It seems that this supernaturality may involve two things: (1) the course of the miraculous event; (2) the cause of the miraculous event. We should consider each of them separately and specify what we understand by the supernatural course of the event and by the supernatural cause of the event. If we could prove that we can talk about supernatural events at least in one of the two signaled aspects of supernaturality, then we would be able to define the miraculous event as a supernatural one. The analyses proposed in the paper allow us to formulate the following statement concerning the miraculous event, which is, to a great extent, a critical correction of the traditional way of understanding it: the miracle may be correctly understood as a supernatural event, only when this supernaturality concerns the personal cause of the event and not its course.*

**Keywords:** Laws of nature, miracle, ontology, supernaturality.

## 1. Introduction

The notion of the supernatural of an event may be understood in various ways (see Williams 1990 and Daston 1991). Most frequently 'the supernatural' means 'separated from the nature', i.e. different from the nature. Thus, what is meant here is the difference in ontological nature. Sometimes, the events understood as supernatural ones are those that belong to a certain part of nature inaccessible to human knowledge. In this case, the problem of supernaturalism is reduced to the question of human cognitive limitations. Therefore, the supernatural thing is the one, which hasn't been known yet or which will never be known as natural.<sup>1</sup>

The definitions of miracle, we can encounter, emphasize the fact that we may talk about the miracle only when the phenomenon takes place beyond the natural order or stands in opposition to it.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the natural (scientific) explanation of the event is not possible and will never be so. It seems, therefore, that the attribute of supernaturalism, which expresses the ontology of the miracle, is regarded as an irreducible base for asserting its absolute inexplicability in terms of nature.<sup>3</sup> Simultaneously, the miracle as a supernatural event is regarded as the act of exceeding the laws of natural sciences (scientific laws) as well as the laws of the nature itself.

The description of the miracle as a 'supernatural event' contains in itself the reference to that which is natural. The supernaturalism of an event means that it surpasses (transcends) naturalism. Additionally, this transcendence contains a kind of opposition to that which is natural. Although the supernaturalism of the event is a kind of unnaturalism, the natural element is not entirely annihilated by it. Rather, we should

<sup>1</sup> See Miller, Vandome and McBrewster (2009: 36–37). Such an approach to the supernaturalism of the miracle is present e.g. in John Locke's works. For Locke, the violation of the established course of nature by a miracle involves merely the violation of the laws, causes and effects we know. Thus, the miracle, understood as a violation of the laws of nature involves, in fact, the conformity with laws that are unknown to us. These laws, together with the ones we know, constitute the full set of the 'laws of nature' (see Mooney 2005: 150).

<sup>2</sup> The notion of the miracle as an event that contradicts natural laws originates from the distinction between the natural and supernatural causes, introduced by Anselm of Canterbury. William of Auvergne, in turn, distinguished two elements within the notion of miracle: the Divine origin and the opposition to the forces of nature. The description of the miracle as a fact as opposed to nature, most probably, appeared for the first time in the work of medieval scholar, Alexander of Hales'. Yet, he noted that specifying the miracle as a 'contra naturam' event is insufficient, as strange and mysterious things may also take place that are inconsistent with nature or even in opposition to it and they are not miracles, because they arise from natural causes (see Grant 1952).

<sup>3</sup> Such an approach towards miraculous events is characteristic of apologetics (fundamental theology), and is manifested in numerous statements concerning miraculous events such as 'violating the laws of nature' (see Hesse 1965: 36; Walker 1982: 103–108; Basinger 1984: 1–8).

say that what we have in the case of a miraculous event is the metamorphosis of the natural into the supernatural.<sup>4</sup>

Although the supernatural event is usually regarded as being brought about in an unnatural way, it is not a necessary condition of the supernaturality of the event. The supernatural event may have no cause, and despite this fact, it may be the event going 'beyond' the causal force of nature. For instance, a cosmologist with purely materialistic views may say that the first natural phenomenon in the history of the cosmos was a supernatural event, which was not engendered by any previous natural cause.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, although it is necessary for the supernatural cause to be unnatural in character, the supernatural event may be both natural and unnatural in its course. The only requirement is that the supernatural event cannot be brought about in a natural way, i.e. by a natural cause. It may be useful at this point, to introduce the distinction between the permanently (unconditionally) supernatural event and the conditionally supernatural one. The former is the event, which may never be caused by a natural cause. The latter, however, could be caused by a natural cause on certain conditions, but in this particular case, these conditions are not met.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, it is sometimes suggested that the miracle should be described as the natural effect of the event which was brought about by an unnatural cause, and which couldn't be brought about in a natural way (see P. Dietl 1968: 130–134; Young 1972: 123; Ward 2002: 741–750). Such a definition doesn't contain the direct statement concerning the character of the unnatural cause. Hence, scholars claim that the miracle is the event, which remains beyond the capabilities of nature and its activities. They talk about miraculous events as being exclusively unnatural, and not as being merely supernatural.<sup>7</sup>

However, the question of the degree of transcendence, of that which is natural within supernatural events, is still a matter of debate among authors dealing with the problem of miracles.<sup>8</sup> They commonly agree

<sup>4</sup> For example, biblical miracles are supernatural events taking place within the natural world (Ex 14,1–30; 2Chr 5:1–14; Jn 2:1–11 and many more)

<sup>5</sup> Such a situation may take place in the case of cosmology of cyclic cosmos, in which we are unable to indicate the first natural event. For example, see Steinhardt and Turok 2001: 1436–1439.

<sup>6</sup> For instance, the virgin conception of a child is naturally possible with the use of so-called artificial insemination, yet, it wasn't so in the case of Christ's conception by the Holy Virgin, as the appropriate medical technique was unknown then. Yet, the very distinction between that which is 'natural' and that which is 'artificial' seems arguable in many cases (see Meller 2010: 191–199).

<sup>7</sup> Not every unnatural cause need be regarded as a supernatural one, although each supernatural cause would, at the same time, be an unnatural one. Thus, we may still distinguish the category of 'merely unnatural cause' (see Clarke 2007). It doesn't change the fundamental problem of the unambiguous determination of the different nature of these causes.

<sup>8</sup> "The fundamental problem is not about miracle, but about transcendence" (Hesse 1965: 42).

that the miracle is the effect of God's action, but they argue with regard to determining a sufficient basis for asserting God's intervention in nature. Some of them think that the miraculous phenomenon has to be one that has not been explained by science so far.<sup>9</sup> Others tend to be stricter and claim that in order for a given event to be classified as a miracle, it has to be proved that it is not only unexplained so far, but also can never be explained.<sup>10</sup> Still others express the opinion that even the phenomenon, for which there exists a natural explanation, a miraculous event has only occurred, provided we know for certain that it was actually performed by God (see Clarke 1997).

Thus, the miracle treated as a supernatural event should be regarded as transcending regularities that exist within nature and those attributed to it by natural scientists. Yet, in the case of the transcending regularities that exist within nature and those attributed to it by natural scientists. Yet, in the case of the aforementioned transcendence, we have not only insufficient human knowledge about the world and its processes, but also the transcendence of a certain state of nature—i.e. its internal regularities—independent of human knowledge. The supernatural event is, therefore, regarded as the event transcending the laws of nature, and constituting the ontological structure of material reality. Because of this transcendence, the miraculous event is also treated as inexplicable within the methods and explanations provided by natural sciences.

The discrepancies just signaled, in which there also appears the problem of a natural inexplicability of the miracle, make us reflect more deeply upon defining the miraculous event as a supernatural one. It seems that this supernaturality may involve two things: (1) the course of a miraculous event; (2) the cause of a miraculous event. We should consider each of them separately and specify what we understand by the supernatural course of event and by the supernatural cause of event. If we could prove that we can talk about supernatural events in at least one of the two signaled aspects of supernaturality, then we would be able to define the miraculous event as a supernatural one.

## *2. A critique of the concept of miracle as an event with a supernatural course*

'Extraordinariness' of the course of event can be understood as being in the epistemological or ontological category. Thus, there are situations (at least potentially), in which our being surprised and astonished can-

<sup>9</sup> Yet, some scholars think that such an approach towards the miracle carries in itself the danger that a phenomenon in the current state of knowledge regarded as a miracle may turn out to be a natural one in the future.

<sup>10</sup> "We can only speak of a miracle when an event occurs outside and against the known order of nature. This event must not be open to any natural explanation whatsoever, and it must also never be capable of explanation in any natural way whatsoever" (Loos 1965: 46).

not be treated merely as the consequence of lack of knowledge of the nature of the world (a lack that may be overcome by gaining a more thorough knowledge of reality); it is rather, that our being surprised and astonished should be treated as something related to the irreducibility of the unpredictable character of natural processes, that follow from their functioning in a way that is different from the normal (natural) one. However, the ontological extraordinariness doesn't seem to be the necessary determinant of that which is miraculous. This is so, because the supernatural course of the event is the one that should differ significantly from the natural course. The supernatural course should mean violation, suspension, or surpassing the regularities of nature. Each of the situations just mentioned, concerns, in turn, the change within the metaphysical structure of material beings or imposing on them (from outside) a new way of acting and interacting. Yet, it seems that, in both cases, the way the world functions remain natural but different with respect to the phenomenal sphere.

So far, understanding miraculous events as the ones violating, suspending or surpassing the laws of nature in force is, to a great extent, the consequence of the picture of the world, which was provided by the emergence and development of the natural sciences. The period of looking at nature in a mechanistic and strictly deterministic way, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup>, and partly, in the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, strengthened the conviction that events and processes inconsistent with the established regularities of nature violate its laws. Yet, further development of natural sciences questioned such an approach towards phenomena, which couldn't be explained by adopted scientific theories. The remarkable example of this change is the emergence of quantum mechanics in 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rules of quantum mechanics are not deterministic but statistical. The fact that contemporary natural sciences rejected the strictly deterministic picture of reality changed the status of these sciences as the one that determines accurately what is or is not possible within nature. Existing scientific theories turned out, and still turn out, to be susceptible either to partial modifications or to being totally questioned.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the switch from Newtonian to quantum physics, as well as the emergence of deterministic chaos theory and of other theories didn't significantly influence the way miraculous events are understood. They still are the events, which by their nature, fall beyond the regularities of the natural world. Because of the lack of any clearly formulated idea, the question of supernaturalism of miraculous events still remains a matter of debate.

In considerations concerning the miracle being understood as the violation or suspension of regularities of nature, we may encounter the opinion that the very concept of suspension or violation of some

<sup>11</sup> The example of such changes in cosmology may be the theory of the Stationary State, which was refuted because of new empirical results concerning universe expansion (see Singh 2005).

regularity is internally contradictory. If the true event  $Z$  occurs inconsistently with the nomological principle  $N$  concerning the course of phenomena, it means that the principle  $N$  doesn't determine properly 'that which cannot happen', and for that reason, this principle can no longer be treated as nomological. Yet, if the principle  $N$  is really a nomological one, the event  $Z$  cannot be regarded as its actual violation. So, the event  $Z$  cannot be understood as being an 'actual' violation of any regularity. The nomological principle is regarded as the universal and necessary law (see McKinnon 1967: 309–312; Flew 1976: 28–30).

Other authors, who think that the fundamental problem connected with the concept of miracle as the event that breaks the regularities of nature involves the fact that this conception is used to defend the supranaturalistic approach within theistic apologetics, argue with the above opinion (see Corner 2007: 2; Byrne 1978: 166–169; Kellenberger 1979: 152–153). They claim that in the case of the natural functioning of nature, the laws of nature indicate that we have a situation, in which there is no intervention by God. But these laws do not inform us about the way the world functions in the case of divine intervention. When this intervention takes place, the laws of nature are violated and a miraculous event emerges (see Otte 1996: 155).

The treatment of miraculous events, which in their course, surpass the laws of nature, requires a more detailed description of the ontological structure of a supernatural event, and then, considering the validity of describing the miracle as a supernatural event. The miraculous event surpassing the laws of nature may be treated as the exception from these laws. We should then wonder whether such an event is supernatural or natural in character. The answer will depend on the adopted type of the cause of a given event. Let us suppose that the event  $X$  is inconsistent with the law of nature  $P$ , confirmed many times. There are three possible explanations of the occurrence of the event  $X$ : (1) some unknown (and perhaps inscrutable) natural cause brought about this event; (2) the event  $X$  was brought about by the action of the supernatural cause; (3) the event  $X$  doesn't have a natural or supernatural cause; it can be regarded as a single, unique anomaly.

In the case of first option, there is no reason for understanding the event as surpassing the law of nature and for treating it as a supernatural event. In the second case, however, the event is treated as surpassing the law of nature and hence it is a supernatural event. Yet, if the laws of nature determine what happens (or doesn't happen) in specific natural circumstances, they cannot be used to explain the event, which happens when the supernatural cause acts. Therefore, even if the event that took place is inconsistent with the law of nature and was brought about by a supernatural cause, we wouldn't be able to say that it surpasses the laws of nature and hence it is a supernatural event. The third option, in turn, assumes that the law of nature is adequately and empirically confirmed and the event, which takes

place, does so only once. Thus, we can say that the principle and exception from it are present simultaneously, namely, that the type *X* events both occur and do not occur in the same natural circumstances. Such a situation would mean that we wouldn't have to make a choice between the rejection of event *X* and the modification or rejection of the law *P*. Some authors express the opinion that only such events may be regarded as surpassing the laws of nature (see Basinger and Basinger 1986: 13–14). Thus, it would be a supernatural event, not because of its supernatural cause, but because it surpasses the laws of nature, i.e. its supernatural course. Nevertheless, such an event couldn't be described as a miracle, as it excludes the action of any cause, including God. Therefore, in the light of the options just considered, we have the alternatives: the event is supernatural either because of its course (it can be described as violating, suspending or surpassing the laws of nature), or because of the action by the supernatural cause, which brought it about. The third option, in which an event is supernatural, due to both its supernatural course and cause, turns out to be unnecessary, because the action of the supernatural cause doesn't necessarily have to generate the supernatural course of the event. In the case of the second element of the above alternative, the event is not supernatural in its course (it is not questioning the laws of nature), but is supernatural because of its supernatural cause.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the second element of the above alternative, i.e. the action of the supernatural cause, is sufficient to classify the event as the supernatural one, without deciding whether its course is, or is not, supernatural.

It is reasonable to present fundamental difficulties, which emerge when a supranaturalistic conception of the miracle is adopted, with regard to its supernatural course. The element, appearing within the conception just mentioned, is the attempt to define the miracle as the event that directly violates the laws of nature, or at least, the one that surpasses these laws or brings about any other form of intervention into the natural function of the world. Yet, there is no clear reason for accepting the view that the event, which cannot be subject to any natural regularity, has to be treated as the violation of this regularity. While analyzing the conception of miracle as the event violating the laws of nature, we have to note that within this framework, the miracle is treated as something, which 'tears apart' the structure of nature, and hence the miracle is possible only if we assume the existence of an efficient cause external to nature. Yet, the internal contradiction is not obvious within the very conception of violating the laws of nature, as contemporary writers want it. There is no inconsistency in the state-

<sup>12</sup> According to Mumford, the best way of understanding the miracle is to treat it as the event, which is natural with regard to its course, but having its supernatural cause. In Mumford's opinion, such conception of the miracle may (but doesn't have to) lead to the claim that its emergence is necessarily connected with breaking the laws of nature (see Mumford 2001: 191–202; cf. Clarke 2003: 459–463; Luck 2003: 465–469; Clarke 2003: 471–474).

ment that an event happened, which we cannot subordinate to the laws of nature, and that the laws of nature are understood as fully determined regularities.<sup>13</sup> But there is no reason to treat such an event as a violation, i.e. as something, which in some way, is inconsistent with the real structure of the natural world or as something that forces us to accept the existence of anything surpassing nature.<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to point to any empirical criteria when distinguishing the anomalies caused by supernatural intervention into nature from 'ordinary anomalies' or from spontaneous breakdowns of natural order. This is why supernaturalists have no reasons for claiming that a specific anomaly is the result of supernatural intervention into the natural order of things and that the emergence of this anomaly means the supernatural course of events. Let us emphasize here that there exists the possibility of proving the distinction just mentioned, in the case of capturing supernatural intervention in teleological terms.

It is worth noting once again, that the main problem connected with the conception of the miracle as the event that breaks the laws of nature involves the fact that this conception is used to defend the supernaturalistic approach. But the category of the supernatural course of a miraculous event turns out to be useless for an apologist, who seeks to persuade us that nature is not all that exists.<sup>15</sup> This is so because it is impossible to provide a way of distinguishing the event proceeding in the supernatural way, from the one being an ordinary natural anomaly. It seems, therefore, that we should search for other objective criteria in

<sup>13</sup> The law of nature is only conditionally (physically) necessary; it is not absolutely (metaphysically) necessary, as its negation leads to falseness and not to absurdity. If the laws of nature are not absolutely, but relatively necessary, miraculous events are not contradictions in themselves.

<sup>14</sup> We can also imagine the situation, in which the miracle means a natural effect caused by the supernatural cause, and this natural effect could also potentially be brought about in a natural way, by a natural cause. Miraculous events understood in this way can be divided into two categories: (1) 'replacement' miracles—when the natural cause, which could appear in a natural way, is actually brought about by a supernatural cause; (2) miracles 'through the natural non-determination of phenomena'—when the natural effect, which can appear in a natural way, is not caused by a natural cause, but, at the same time, this natural effect is different from the one, which would appear, if it was not caused by a supernatural cause. Scholars started talking about miracles of the second kind together with the emergence of quantum mechanics. These miracles became popular, because in their supporters' opinion, if at the atomic level nature is not determined, then God could intervene at this level, without causing the supernatural course of the event, and merely 'choosing' a specific quantum state of a physical system. Manipulating the initial conditions at the quantum level, God may bring about unusual events that are inconsistent with the regularities observed at present (see Murphy 1995: 112).

<sup>15</sup> "The fact that our senses and measuring apparatus are able to capture some of these things, while some others are not, is the epistemological not ontological problem. So if we want to adopt the ontological criterion, in spite of all, then, if we are unable to distinguish between the nature and non-nature, we have to assert that the nature includes all the things, including angels and miracles, if we believe in them" (Talasiewicz 2007: 408).



determining that which is extraordinary-supernatural and that the extraordinariness of the event, understood in an ontological way, doesn't have to be identified with violating, suspending or surpassing the regularities of nature (see Adams 1992; Hanfield 2001; Larmer 2011).

### 3. *The critique of the concept of miracle as an event with a supernatural cause*

The conclusion to the previously made detailed considerations of the supernatural cause of an event is the rejection of these conceptions of miracle, which assume that a possible miraculous event can only be explained by pointing to the supernatural cause, as being the one that is responsible for its occurrence.<sup>16</sup> The supranaturalistic approach, which I'm criticizing, treats the supernatural cause as the hypothesis explaining the event, concurrent with the naturalistic attempts of explaining the event. Hence, if it is possible to point to natural causes being responsible for the event, referring to the supernatural cause no longer makes sense.

The fundamental problem connected with the notion of a supernatural cause is that supranaturalists treat the supernatural cause analogically to the natural one. Yet, such an analogy should be regarded as the empty one, because treating the supernatural cause similarly to the natural one changes, each time, our notion of the supernatural cause to that of a natural cause. Additionally, there exists no way of characterizing the supernatural cause without making an analogy with the natural one. But if we seek to preserve the fundamental distinctness of the character of supernatural and natural cause, then there would be the problem of determining the way the supernatural cause influences the natural elements of the world (see Miles 1966; Pratt 1968; Saler 1977).

Thus, those who defend the claim concerning the supernatural cause of some event, encounter a dilemma—two possible solutions both of which turn out to be unsatisfactory. A supranaturalist, willing to explain the conception of supernatural cause, characterizes it in a way similar to the natural one. In consequence, the difference between the two causes is obliterated, and the supernatural causality is reduced to the natural one. If the supporter of the existence of a supernatural cause wants to justify its distinct character, he may encounter another problem. When he accepts its distinctness from a natural cause and treats it as an unnatural cause, a doubt arises concerning the possibility of defining it as a cause as such, since the common basis for comparing both causes is removed. Moreover, the radical distinction between the natural and supernatural raise questions on the abilities of causal impact of that which is supernatural, on that which is natural.

<sup>16</sup> There is also the possibility of understanding the supernatural cause as the one cooperating with the natural ones. In this case, the supernatural cause doesn't exclude the operation of natural causes.

The analogy between the natural and supernatural cause turns out to be inadequate in the sense that the supernatural cause doesn't have in it a certain crucial feature, which the natural cause possesses, namely, the property of physical impact. Thus, it is unknown how the supernatural cause influences the natural world, and if it is impossible to explain, in what sense can we talk about the supernatural cause as the one analogous to the natural cause? Moreover, in order to use the analogy in question, we should assume that the action of the supernatural cause is subject to specific laws, as it is in the case of the natural causes operating inside the world. These laws should be distinguishable from the laws concerning the functioning of nature. Yet, we do not know the laws other than those functioning inside the universe. Thus, what we should do is either to assume that the interactions between nature and the supernatural are subject to the laws of the nature we know, or to speculate on the existence of some unknown laws governing these interactions. In the first case, that which we describe as the supernatural turns out only to be the continuation of that which is natural and the expansion of the applicability of natural laws. In the second case, however, we should assert that we can say nothing about these unknown laws. We may observe the cooperation of nature and the supernatural just from the viewpoint of the observer situated inside the natural universe and using its laws; and this doesn't give us the chance to reasonably use the analogy between the natural and supernatural laws, or even to say something positive about the existence of the latter. The laws concerning nature always operate together with the physical properties of bodies, e.g. their mass, momentum, electric charge, etc. Then what would the statement mean that the laws governing the interaction between the natural and supernatural being 'is similar' to the laws governing the interaction of material bodies, with the objection that, because one element of the interaction is supernatural, i.e. nonphysical, it is not the interaction between material bodies? Once again, we see that the analogy is inadequate (Corner 2015: 48–49).

Thus, the supernatural cause cannot possess any physical properties, and if such properties are attributed to it, it becomes the natural cause. If we treat both kinds of causes as totally distinct from each other, then, because we know only the natural causes, we may wonder if the supernatural action may still be treated as the cause.

A similar difficulty may be observed within the conception of a supernatural explanation, which is a further element of the supernaturalistic conception of the miracle. This explanation is reduced to approving the action of the supernatural cause. If it is applied in terms of being an analogy of scientific (natural) explanation, it should have the property of empirical verifiability, which obviously seems impossible, because of the total distinctness between the supernatural cause and the natural causes. If, in turn, empirical verification of the action of the cause, which remains beyond the set of causes known so far, the

conception of supernatural explanation would turn out to be unnecessary, because each explanation, which can be verified in an empirical way, loses the property of the supernatural explanation. So, we can assume that a given event is the miracle manifesting divine action, but we shouldn't explain this event by looking for a supernatural cause. If we search for the explanation of a miraculous event, this explanation is completely different in character from the one used within natural sciences. Such an explanation should not refer to pointing to the cause, but should be teleological in character. Particularly, if we agree that explaining the event is realized not only by referring to the laws of nature, but also by providing the meaning of a given fact.

There is still one more problem to be discussed here. It appears that when describing a natural anomaly such as the event with the supernatural cause, we gain nothing. Why would the reference to the supernatural cause be better than approving the action of some unknown natural cause or lack of any cause at all? The exception here is the situation in which we understand the supernatural cause as the personal one, which is identified with God's action. Yet, those two terms are not synonymous (although they are often used interchangeably). Thus, only if we treat the anomaly as a manifestation of personal divine action (analogical to human action), are we able to prove the significant contrast between an event of this sort and an 'ordinary' anomaly, i.e. a spontaneous break in natural order. The very assertion concerning the action of the supernatural cause changes nothing, because such cause, by its nature, cannot be connected with the space and time of our world. Its action cannot be transmitted by any physical interaction.

Let us apply here the comparison to hypothetical material objects with features that are impossible to recognize empirically. Even if a given object had an unrecognizable feature, it would contribute nothing to our knowledge of it in relation to our knowledge of the objects without this feature. By introducing the supernatural cause, and treating it, at the same time, as a special kind of natural one, we gain nothing. Because we cannot imagine the supernatural cause in any way other than as an analogy of the natural cause, we should propose, as a replacement, the conception of the supernatural-personal cause and, in consequence, the teleological approach towards the miracle as the manifestation of God's will and action, together with the context it is manifested in. Simultaneously, we should move away from capturing God's action in purely causal terms, particularly, when understood as having an outside (interventionist) impact on the world.

Thus, the basic mistake concerning the conception of a miraculous event is the application of an interventionist conception of God's action (breaking the laws of nature), as well as combining it with the notion of a supernatural cause and supernatural course of the event. It leads to the emergence of the opposition between God and nature, which is absolute, and impossible to overcome notionally; it also leads to a one-

sided way of looking at miraculous events as the effects of divine action understood in terms of the way an efficient cause operates.

#### 4. Conclusion

David Hume, one of the most famous critics of the possibility of miraculous events, expressed the conviction that the accounts of miracles and prodigies will be found in all history, sacred and profane (D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, Section X: Of Miracles*). The accuracy of the prediction made by the Scottish rationalist has been confirmed in the subsequent centuries (including the present one). This confirmation was made through the constant appearance of such accounts, and discussions, which concerned, and still concern, the possibility of the occurrence of events described as miraculous, and the nature of these events. Moreover, Hume's statement seems to reveal the element of human nature, which generates the human need of accepting new intellectual challenges in the face of such events, or at least, the theoretical possibility of their occurrence. Without judging at this point, how to classify the events described as miraculous, we should say that the miracle is a particularly interesting object of interest for the human mind. This is because of the mystery accompanying the miracle; because of the complexity of the problems considered with respect to the miracle; and because of the views revealed when discussing the miracle.

Yet, is the problem of the miracle important and interesting from a philosophical point of view? The views in this respect vary considerably, yet it seems that the notion of a miracle and its content should be interesting for those who attempt to know the nature of the reality around them, and the reality that they are an element of; and also for those who endeavor to understand the process of discovering the world and the existential experience of a human being. It appears that a miracle, and the considerations of it, exemplifies the content of these very fundamental questions stimulating everyone who tries to gain at least a slightly better understanding and at least a bit more wisdom. If a miracle itself is the peripheral problem for philosophy in its traditional sense, the problems it poses are certainly, very important for philosophers as the basis for genuine philosophical quests.

What we can also observe in contemporary philosophy of the miracle is the characteristic trend towards 'naturalizing' miraculous events. This tendency in philosophical quests takes two basic forms: (1) the tendency to explain miraculous events by suggesting the manner in which God would act within nature (i.e. explaining the 'mechanism' of God's action within nature); and (2) the tendency to reduce miraculous events to purely natural ones, the explanation of which should be sought within constantly developing natural sciences. Both the aforementioned ways of 'naturalizing' the miracle pose certain difficulties. The first could be described as a 'moderate naturalization'. Although

it preserves the notion of miracle, there are some objections against it, namely because, it imposes a certain vision of God's action within nature, while trying to negotiate this vision with the present state of natural knowledge about the world. The second, however, goes even further; it can be described as a 'radical naturalization', because it seems to lead straight towards questioning the traditional sense of miracle the possibility of its occurrence, and as a result, to classifying it as an ordinary natural phenomenon. Both forms of naturalizing miraculous events, present in literature, seem to be dead ends as far as their results are concerned. They lead either to endless speculations on God's interactions with nature, or to eliminating the miracle as such. If we want to avoid both dangerous situations and their results, we should take a fresh look at the problem of the miracle and we should find a new way of understanding it.

Understanding the miracle is closely connected with understanding it as an event caused by God.<sup>17</sup> It is usually assumed that if a miraculous event is the effect of God's intervention in the material world, it must be regarded as different from the ordinary (natural) phenomena of nature. In this case, the postulate of regarding the miracle as a supernatural event is the consequence of understanding the miraculous event, as the one, the efficient cause of which is God. Yet, we can adopt the reverse way of argumentation, namely, starting from the ontological extraordinariness of the event, understood as its supernaturality, we can search for an adequate cause for events of this type. This way of analyzing the notion of miraculous event has the philosophical advantage of not assuming a priori that this event was brought about by the actions of a transcendental being on nature.

If we accept the possibility of the existence of extraordinary-supernatural events we may (and even should) think of their cause. The potential occurrence of supernatural events, because of their being ontologically diverse from the natural ones, requires the appropriate justification. It means the necessity to point to the cause, which would be capable of bringing about a supernatural event. Because natural causes are capable of bringing about only natural effects, the cause, which would be responsible for the occurrence of a supernatural event, should also be supernatural in character. The supernatural character of the cause bringing about a supernatural event means that it cannot be any cause coming from the field of nature. It is the case with both the part of nature, which is already known to us, and the natural processes and phenomena, which are still cognitively inaccessible. We assume that both the field of known natural phenomena and the unknown ones, and probably, the inscrutable ones too, is governed by the internal principles characteristic of this field, and hence, on its own, it

<sup>17</sup> The authors dealing with the problem of miraculous events share the conviction that if there is no reason to regard a given event as caused by God, there is no reason either, to regard it as a miracle (see Corner 2015).

doesn't generate the events that can be regarded as supernatural ones. Thus, we should take into account that, the principle being the fundament of causality, the effects are of the same nature as their causes, i.e. the effects are proportional to their causes.

Thus, while searching for an adequate cause of supernatural events, we may determine it as the external cause, transcendental in relation to the material world. Within a strictly philosophical perspective, the absolute being is usually regarded as such a transcendental factor. Within a philosophical and religious perspective (e.g. Christianity, Judaism, Islam), however, the factor in question is called God and treated as the unique personal being. God, as a being, not belonging to nature, and His existence that is significantly different in character from the material beings, seems to be regarded as the main candidate for causing a supernatural event; this is because of the characteristics, which are attributed to Him.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the miracle, understood as a supernatural event, may be justified by the action of supernatural cause, which is seen to be God.

Some authors claim that all the adequate and complete explanations causal in character should be the scientific explanations, namely, they should determine empirically all the conditions, both necessary and sufficient, for the occurrence of a given phenomenon. Therefore, if God's action is, by its nature, non-empirical, any event caused directly by God contains in itself the efficient cause, empirically unverifiable. Thus, such an event is supernatural and it cannot be adequately explained within natural sciences. This is why such an explanation cannot be regarded as the one, which is causal in character (Nowell-Smith 1950). For instance, the prayer that precedes the sudden healing of an ill person may be regarded as the circumstance preceding the healing and directly connected with God's action, the result of which is the recovery. Yet, God and His actions are, by their nature, imperceptible to the human senses.

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<sup>18</sup> Also other immaterial beings, spiritual beings, (both good and evil ones), who would be able to influence with their actions the course of the phenomena taking place in the world may be regarded as the agents of supernatural events. Another question is whether such an action may be called a miracle. This action should be considered within the context of their created nature. Good spirits only execute God's will; namely, they are merely the instruments of His actions. While evil spirits cannot, by their actions, realize the good intended by God. Thus, we cannot regard their activity as the miraculous one, since they are either the intermediate element of miracle, which is worked by God, or their action is not oriented towards the good, which, within Christian theology, contradicts the crucial characteristics of the miracle, i.e. the good purpose of the occurrence of miraculous event (see Lawton 1959: 33; Beaudoin 2007; Weddle 2010: 28–29).

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