

«DIE KÜNSTLERISCHE BETRACHTUNGSWEISE...»,
WITTGENSTEIN SOBRE LOS MILAGROS

«Die Künstlerische Betrachtungsweise...»: Wittgenstein on Miracles

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Abstract

Miracles are certainly a matter for the philosophy of religion. A defence is here raised, however, of the idea that Wittgenstein's conception of miracles is closely connected with the artistic way of seeing in general, and with the consideration of literary fiction in particular. The connection can be established through a family of closely related concepts: "seeing as", "the dawning of an aspect", "image" and "perspective". They are all involved in Wittgenstein's aesthetic conceptions, in his analyses of art and also in his conception of miracles.

Key words

Wittgenstein, miracles, art, religion.

Resumen

Los milagros son ciertamente una cuestión de filosofía de la religión. En cualquier caso, me gustaría defender que la concepción de los milagros de Wittgenstein está íntimamente conectada con la forma de contemplación artística en general y con la consideración de la ficción literaria en particular. La conexión puede establecerse a través de una familia de conceptos relacionados: «ver como», «el fulgor de un aspecto», «imagen» y «perspectiva». Estos conceptos están incluidos en las concepciones estéticas de Wittgenstein, en sus análisis del arte y también en su concepción de los milagros.

Palabras clave

Wittgenstein, milagros, arte, religión.

IT MAY SEEM SURPRISING THAT I HAVE CHOSEN TO TALK about the conception that Wittgenstein had of miracles in a context in which the title of the event in which we are participating is *Wittgenstein and Aesthetics: philosophy and the history of ideas*. Well, the question of miracles is certainly a matter of philosophy of religion. However, I would like to defend the idea that Wittgenstein's conception of miracles is closely connected with the artistic way of seeing in general, and with the consideration of literary fiction in particular. The connection can be established through a family of closely related concepts: «seeing as», «the dawning of an aspect», «image» and «perspective». They are all involved in Wittgenstein's aesthetic conceptions, in his analyses of art and also in his conception of miracles.

At a very early point in his writings Wittgenstein establishes the relationship between miracles and art. In a note dated 20-10-1916 in his *Notebooks 1914–1916* he says:

Aesthetically, the miracle is that the world exists (*Das künstlerische Wunder ist, dass es die Welt gibt*). That there is what there is.

Is it the essence of the artistic way of looking (*künstlerische Betrachtungsweise*) at things, that it looks at the world with a happy eye?

Life is grave, art is gay.¹

This quotation reminds us of well-known statements; from the *Tractatus*: «It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists.»² Or from the *Lecture on Ethics*, in which he paraphrases the «experience of wondering at the existence of the world» as «the experience of seeing the world as a miracle». In fact, in this latter statement Wittgenstein combines the miraculous with a particular way of seeing: wondering at the existence of the world is *seeing it as* a miracle. If we now go back to the quotation from the *Notebooks 1914–1916*, we can underline two aspects: the fact that Wittgenstein connects miracles with art, or more

1. Wittgenstein, L. *Notebooks 1914–16*, Basil Blackwell, 1998, p. 86.

2. TLP 6.44.

precisely with the way of seeing that art *implies and requires* (*Die künstlerische Betrachtungsweise*) and that gives rise to a gaze of wonder.

However, this way of considering miracles is not characteristic only of the period of the *Tractatus* and the *Lecture on Ethics*. Wittgenstein maintained it throughout his writings, irrespective of the changes in his conception of meaning. As late as 1947 Wittgenstein wrote:

The miracles of nature.

We might say: art *discloses* the miracles of nature to us. It is based on the *concept* of the miracles of nature. (The blossom, just opening out. What is *marvellous* [*herrlich*] about it?) We say: 'Look, how it's opening out!'³

Once again, in this late note, art, its way of perceiving and considering the world and its events, is connected with the miraculous. I shall come back to all this later.

Firstly, however, I shall sketch the most general features of how Wittgenstein conceives religion. Secondly, I shall analyse his conception of miracles in order to show its coherence with his conception of religion. In other words, I wish to show that the miraculous nature of miracles is symbolic. The uncertain effect of the miracle narratives, insofar as they depend on a particular way of looking at events attuned with art, is the moral *perspective* that is established through the grasping of the image of the life of the person – who may be a real person or a literary character – who performs a gesture that embodies his spirit and that can thereby be considered as a *model*. Finally, I wish to defend the view that it is possible to apply to the analysis of his conception of miracles the family of concepts to which I referred earlier: «seeing as», «the dawning of an aspect», «image», «perspective» and others akin to them.

Religion

What Wittgenstein thinks about miracles is coherent with his conception of religion. Perhaps one of the places where he sums up this point of view most clearly is a late fragment (1947) included in *Culture and Value* in which he refers not only to Christianity but also to «religious belief» in general:

It appears to me as though a religious belief could only be (something like) passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates. Hence although it's belief, it is really a way of living, or a way of judging life. Passionately taking up *this* interpretation. And so instructing in a religious belief would have to be portraying, describing that system of reference & at the same time appealing to the conscience. And these together would have to result finally in the one under instruction himself, of his own accord, passionately taking up that system of reference. It would be as though someone were on the one hand to let me see my hopeless situation, on the other

3. Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, Blackwell, 1998, 82.

depict the rescue-anchor, until of my own accord, or at any rate not led by the hand by the *instructor*, I were to rush up & seize it.⁴

Therefore a religious faith is not a system of theoretical or empirical propositions. This is a point on which Wittgenstein insisted throughout the 1930s, when he reflected from a comparative perspective both on what were then called «primitive religions» and on the nature of Christianity as one of the religions that was culturally closest to him. At this point his emphasis on seeing religion and its statements «as outside the world» (a point of view characteristic of the *Tractatus* period) disappears, but he insists on not considering its propositions as descriptive. The terms of religion form part of sets of normative and expressive language, they express and evoke attitudes and feelings, reflect vital commitments, accompany or motivate certain practices and behaviours, and, in short, are ways of seeing life, of keeping the world and the life of each individual in a particular perspective. In this context, during the 1930s (towards the end) he devoted himself to criticising, on the one hand, those who conceive religion as pre-scientific thinking (such as Frazer's evolutionist conceptions), and, on the other, those who relate religious language to supposed events that happened in the remote past or that will take place after death.⁵ Two passages are conclusive:

Christianity is not based on a historical truth, but presents us with a (historical) narrative & says: now believe! But not believe this report with the belief that is appropriate to a historical report, – but rather: believe, through thick & thin & you can do this only as the outcome of a life. *Here you have a message! – don't treat it as you would another historical message! Make a quite different place for it in your life. – There is no paradox about that!*⁶

And also:

Queer as it sounds: the historical accounts of the Gospels might, in the historical sense, be demonstrably false, & yet belief would lose nothing through this: but not because it has to do with 'universal truths of reason'! rather, because historical proof (the historical proof-game) is irrelevant to belief. This message (the Gospels) is seized on by a human being believingly (i.e. lovingly): *That* is the certainty of this 'taking-for-true', nothing else.

The believer's relation to these messages is *neither* a relation to historical truth (probability) nor yet that to a doctrine consisting of 'truths of reason'. There is such a thing. – (We have quite different attitudes even to different species of what we call fiction! [*Dichtung*])⁷

4. Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, 91.

5. This is the period of the *Remarks on Frazer's "Golden Bough"* (between 1931 and 1936), the *Lectures & Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology, and Religious Belief* (edited by Cyril Barrett in accordance with notes taken by Y. Smithies, R. Rhees and J. Taylor in 1938) and the *Movements of Thought* (written in two periods, 1930–32 and 1936–37); also the notes in *Culture and Value* corresponding to those years.

6. Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, 52.

7. Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, 52.

Therefore, religious statements do not have theoretical content, they are neither truths of reason nor truths of fact, ultimately they are not truths at all, and therefore it cannot be said that any one of them is true or that others are mistaken; provided that the believer does not consider his belief as a theory at all, because then the error would lie in that.⁸ Similarly, the certainty that religious affirmations enjoy is not analogous or similar to empirical certainty, nor is it deduced from a set of axioms. Here it is not a question of presenting proof, of formulating hypotheses, of calculating probabilities, of verification, etc. It is a question of «taking for true», that is, «passionately committing oneself to a system of coordinates» which globally imprint a bias on my behaviour and my life. Wittgenstein expresses this idea in the *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, drawing a comparison between two people. One of them thinks of everything that happens to him in terms of retribution or he says he believes in a Judgment Day, whereas the other says that that is not his case. Wittgenstein affirms that these people do not *contradict each other*, that they *do not believe* the opposite, but that they «say different things to themselves», they have different «pictures».

What Wittgenstein understands by «picture» throughout his work is an arduous and much debated question that, for obvious reasons, I shall not go into here. Of course, by picture (*Bild*) he often understands visual images (diagrams, schemata, paintings, portraits, drawings, photographs, etc.). But in the case of religion, confining ourselves to what concerns us here, «picture» is equivalent to a comprehensive or synoptic overview or to constitutive or organisational linguistic forms of expression that determine the formation of new linguistic combinations. In this sense «pictures» are conceptual frames that determine both the way in which the world is perceived and understood and also the space within which criteria for the meaningfulness of a term's application are established. Therefore, the «picture» establishes both a normative conceptual perspective and the ultimate authority to which it refers (and not to a rational justification). Moreover, apart from cases such as Michelangelo's *The Creation of Adam* or the illustrations of the Bible to which Wittgenstein refers in the *Lectures and Conversations...*, religious images, inasmuch as they are constitutive linguistic forms, cannot be translated into other theoretical or emotional forms of expression. Therefore religious «pictures» are clusters of terms and enunciations – only applicable in this context – that determine and govern both the actions and way of facing life of believers and also what they say to themselves.⁹

8. «But – one might say – if he was not in error, surely the Buddhist holy man was – or anyone else – whose religion gives expression to completely different views. But *none* of them was in error, except when he set forth a theory»: Wittgenstein, L. *Remarks on Frazer's "Golden Bough"*, 119.

9. On this point I am closely following the analysis made by P.K. Westergaard, «A note on the late Wittgenstein's use of the picture concept», in *From the ALWS archives: A selection of papers from the International Wittgenstein Symposia in Kirchberg am Wechsel* <<http://wab.uib.no/agora-alws/>>. Republication by the Wittgenstein Archives at the University of Bergen, 2013. Original publication in: *Papers of the 26th IWS: Wissen und Glauben – Knowledge and Belief*. (eds. W. Löffler, P. Weingartner.). Kirchberg am Wechsel: ALWS 2003.

In the next section we shall see that his conception of miracles accords with this conception of religion.

Miracles

In the period of the *Tractatus* and the *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein established a point of view that he never abandoned later: strictly speaking, miracles are not events. If we witness an unprecedented event we can wonder about the reason for it, we can seek its causes, formulate hypotheses... in other words, adopt a scientific point of view that may lead to an explanation or leave us awaiting a satisfactory explanation. But what happens as a result of adopting that scientific attitude is really that we strip the event of its miraculous quality, unless we understand «miracle» to mean what has not yet been explained by science. In the *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein distinguishes between a «relative» meaning and an «absolute» meaning of miracle.¹⁰ We might say that something that is unexplained in accordance with our knowledge of the laws of nature at a given moment is a miracle in a relative sense. In an absolute sense, however, an event retains its miraculous quality by virtue not of its factual components but of an amazed or admiring gaze which is not the inquisitive gaze of science. Therefore, since the miraculous, strictly speaking, is a kind of admiring and amazed consideration, any ordinary event can be miraculous. And that is why Wittgenstein does not hesitate to describe the «experience of wondering at the existence of the world» as «the experience of seeing the world as a miracle». To put it in terms of the *Tractatus* (6.44), it is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but the fact that it *exists*.

Two notes from a later period (1947) help us to understand this, and, incidentally, they show the continuity of his thinking on this point. Wittgenstein speaks of the miracles of nature (*Wunder der Natur*): «the blossom, just opening out», «a crystal». And he relates these two events to two possible attitudes: how they are considered by the artist and by the mathematician. The scientist's gaze may also consider the crystal as one of «the miracles of nature» as long as he does not transform his admiring attitude into a problematic approach that poses questions about the causes of what happens. If he were to do so there would be «a rupture» that would destroy the ability to wonder at the event (the crystallisation) of which we know even beforehand, in this case, that it is based on molecular structure.¹¹ The opposite

10. Wittgenstein, L. [If someone grew a lion's head and began to roar and it was decided to fetch a «doctor and have the case scientifically investigated»]: «For it is clear that when we look at it in this way everything miraculous has disappeared; unless what we mean by this term is merely that a fact has not yet been explained by science which again means that we have hitherto failed to group this fact with others in a scientific system. This shows that it is absurd to say 'Science has proved that there are no miracles.' The truth is that the scientific way of looking at a fact is not the way to look at it as a miracle. For imagine whatever fact you may, it is not in itself miraculous in the absolute sense of that term.» «Lecture on Ethics», *The Philosophical Review*, vol. 74, no. 1, 1965. My emphasis

11. Wittgenstein, L. «The miracles of nature, / We might say: art *discloses* the miracles of nature to us. It is based on the *concept* of the miracles of nature. (The blossom, just opening out. What is *marvellous*

attitude is that of the artist: if someone were to ask «but what is there that is marvellous in that blossom?», one would simply have to reply «look, how it's opening out!» In other words, there is no point in presenting reasons or arguing to convince someone of what is marvellous in the opening of a blossom. Either one is sensitive to it or one is not, either one allows oneself to be impressed by it or one does not. But the ability to be affected also depends on having the *will to cast*¹² that special way of seeing on the world (*Look. The blossom, just opening out!*). I shall return to the characteristics of that way of seeing in the final section.

But there is another thing that must be pointed out: in using the expression «miracles of nature» (*Wunder der Natur*) Wittgenstein is distancing himself from the understanding of miracles as transgressions of the laws of nature or as supernatural interventions in the causal relations of the world as a series of events.

Wittgenstein returned to miracles in the 1930s, and his approach, more developed by then, is coherent with the point of view that we have just described. Indeed, in *Movements of Thought* he says:

If one wants to understand as Dostoevsky did the miracles of Christ such as the miracle at the wedding of Cana, one must consider them symbols! The transformation of water into wine is astounding at best & we would gaze in amazement at the one who could do it, but no more. It therefore cannot be what is magnificent. – What is magnificent is also not that Jesus provides wine for the people at the wedding & also not that he gives it to them in such an unheard of manner. It must be the marvellous that gives this action content & meaning. And by that I don't mean the extraordinary or the unprecedented but the spirit in which it is done and for which the transformation of water into wine is only a symbol (as it were) a gesture. A gesture which (of course) can only be made by the one who can do this extraordinary thing. The miracle must be understood as gesture, as expression if it is to speak to us. I could also say: It is a miracle only when he does it who does it in a marvellous spirit. Without this spirit it is only an extraordinarily strange fact. I must, as it were, know the person already before I can say that it is a miracle. I must read the whole of it already in the right spirit in order to sense the miracle in it!

When I read in a fairy tale that the witch transforms a human being into a wild animal, it is also the spirit of this action, after all, that makes an impression upon me.¹³

[*herrlich*] about it?) We say: 'Look, how it's opening out!'/... The mathematician too can of course marvel at the miracles [*Wunder*] (the crystal) of nature; but can he do it, once a problem has arisen about *what* he sees? Is it really possible as long as the object he finds awe-inspiring or gazes at with awe is shrouded in a philosophical fog? / I could imagine someone admiring trees, & also the shadows, or reflections of trees, which he mistakes for trees. But if he should once tell himself that these are not after all trees & if it becomes a problem for him what they are, or what relation they have to trees, then his admiration will have suffered a rupture, that will now need healing.» *Culture and Value, op. cit.*, 82. My emphasis.

12. "We do not see the human eye as a receiver, it appears not to let anything in, but to send something out. The ear receives; the eye looks. (It casts glances, it flashes, radiates, gleams.)» Wittgenstein, L., *Zettel*, Basil Blackwell, 1998, #222.

13. Wittgenstein, L. *Movements of Thought*, in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Public and Private Occasions*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham (MA), 2003, 91–93.

In this note on *The Brothers Karamazov* Wittgenstein is referring to Chapter 4, «Cana of Galilee», of Book 7, «Alyosha»: when Jesus turned water into wine he wanted to give the people happiness, because what was important for him was not sorrow but happiness: «He who loves men, loves their gladness»¹⁴ (which is what had always been said by Father Zossima, before whose coffin Alyosha is now standing, and as he listens to the story of the wedding in Cana being read aloud he suddenly understands that that is its meaning).

But in Dostoyevsky's story there is something else, which Wittgenstein must have felt as very close: the miracle, i.e. the meaning of the Biblical account of the miracle, is *connected* with an «ecstasy», with an experience of the kind that Wittgenstein called «mystical»: the astonishment or amazement at the existence of the world which Alyosha celebrates at the end of the chapter.¹⁵ But that ineffable experience, expressible through literature, through the allegories or stories of the miracles, transforms Alyosha in a very special way: he sees the world in a different way as he celebrates its existence. It is not the facts of the world that have changed but the way of seeing it, the perspective from which it is considered and valued. Or, to express it in the manner of the *Tractatus*: the limits of the world change and they delimit an ethical space characterised by reflection on a life that is worth being lived.¹⁶

In the period of the *Tractatus*, what we are offered by Tolstoy's stories, Dostoyevsky's novel, tales of witches... is not so much an explicit moral injunction as what is indicated by Wittgenstein's comment on Uhland's poem «Count Eberhard's Hawthorn». Engelmann, in his memoir, sums up thus: «the poem as a whole gives in 28 lines the *picture* of a life».¹⁷ That is: it may be said, in accordance with the conception of meaning in the period of the

14. Dostoyevsky, F. *The Brothers Karamazov*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1958, 424.

15. «The vault of heaven, studded with softly shining stars, stretched wide and vast over him. From the zenith to the horizon the Milky Way stretched its two arms dimly across the sky... The gorgeous autumn flowers in the beds near the house went to sleep till morning. The silence of the earth seemed to merge into the silence of the heavens, the mystery of the earth came in contact with the mystery of the stars... Alyosha stood, gazed, and suddenly he threw himself down flat upon the earth./ He did not know why he was embracing it. He could not have explained to himself why he longed so irresistibly to kiss it, to kiss it all, but he kissed it weeping, sobbing and drenching it with his tears, and vowed frenziedly to love it, to love it for ever and ever... It was as though the threads from all those innumerable worlds of God met all at once in his soul, and it was trembling all over 'as it came in contact with other worlds'. He wanted to forgive everyone and for everything, and to beg forgiveness – oh! not for himself, but for all men, for all and for everything, 'and others are begging for me', it echoed in his soul again.» Dostoyevsky, F. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *op. cit.*, 426–7.

16. In the *Lecture on Ethics* Wittgenstein connects three personal experiences (wonder at the existence of the world, the experience of feeling absolutely safe, and the feeling of guilt) with a conceptual clarification about what he understands by ethics apart from its consideration as «the enquiry into what is good» (Moore). To indicate what he understands by ethics he offers a list of expressions that he considers equivalent: ethics is «the enquiry into what is valuable, or, into what is really important... the enquiry into the meaning of life, or into what makes life worth living, or into the right way of living». Wittgenstein, «Lecture on Ethics», *op. cit.*

17. Engelmann, P. *Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein*, Basil Blackwell, 1967, 83 f. The underlining is mine.

Tractatus, that what is inexpressible in language is offered through literary fiction as a way of seeing, as a *picture* in the light of which the way of considering life changes. In other words: as a new *perspective* that induces a new attitude to life.

But at that point in the 1930s, without a break with the previous period, according to the passage by Dostoyevsky that refers to the wedding in Cana, what was marvellous was not the strangeness of the act of turning water into wine but what «gives this action content & meaning», with the result that the action became a symbol. However, for this second conversion to take place, that is, for the action to become a symbol, it must embody a «spirit» expressed in the gesture of the miracle, for the understanding of which it seems that one «must, as it were, know the person already», that is, incorporate it in the personality (the totality of the life) of the person who performs it.

In the passage in *The Brothers Karamazov*, in the vigil for Father Zossima a monk reads the Gospel and comes to the episode of the wedding in Cana. As Alyosha listens, he says to himself:

It was not grief but men's gladness that Jesus extolled when he worked his first miracle – he helped people to be happy... 'He who loves men, loves their gladness'... Without gladness it is impossible to live... Whatever is true and beautiful is always full of forgiveness...¹⁸

In other words: the gesture acquires meaning in connection with a very general perspective about what human life should be like, presided over by happiness and brotherly bonds, a perspective embodied in the biographical identity of Christ (whether it is historical or not, for there would be no problem in considering him as a literary character, since faith, as we have already indicated, is not based on historical truths, and it would even be possible for the Gospel accounts to be false and that would not alter faith).

In *Movements of Thought*, referring to the figure of an apostle, Wittgenstein once again relates his exceptionality to the form that his life adopts. In other words, what gives symbolic meaning to a gesture is the fact that it is embodied in a life that we set up as a model from which to consider my life and in accordance with which to *inspire*¹⁹ my action in various situations and contexts that are probably very different from the ones experienced by him:

18. Dostoyevsky, F. *The Brothers Karamazov*, *op. cit.*, 424.

19. According to Wittgenstein, a model establishes a *way of observing or considering* with respect to an object. Therefore, the object compared need not share all the features or predicates that characterise the model with which it is compared. To take the life of someone (Jesus, an apostle, a hero in fiction,...) as a model implies learning from it or drawing inspiration from it to confront the challenges of my own life, not to reproduce it, copy it, etc. For the notion of model in Wittgenstein, see Marrades, J., "Wittgenstein, constructor de modelos", in Marrades Millet, J. (ed.), *Wittgenstein. Arte y Filosofía*. Plaza y Valdés. 2012, 119–154. On the sense in which Wittgenstein may have taken the figure of Hadji Murat in Tolstoy's novel as a model, see Sánchez Durá, N., "La virtud moral de las alegorías: Wittgenstein y *Hadji Murat*", in Marrades Millet, J. (ed.), *op. cit.*, 223–254.

To be an apostle is a life. In part it surely expresses itself in what he says, but not in that it is true but in that he says it. Suffering for the idea defines him but here, too, it holds that the meaning of the sentence «this one is an apostle» lies in the mode of its verification. To describe an apostle is to describe a life. What impression this description makes on others must be left to them. Believing in an apostle means to relate toward him in such & such a way – relate actively.²⁰

Now, the *effects* that the apostle's «news» may have, the impression produced by his example and the spirit that animates Christ's gesture in the wedding in Cana depend variously on the state of mind and the moral sensibility of each person. Here we come back to what we emphasised at the start: religious faith is a matter of a passionate commitment to a system of coordinates for judging and acting which one takes up of one's own accord, sovereignly. In other words, ultimately, the religious point of view, the moral perspective that is adopted, does not have a rational foundation.

Once again, this coincides with his opinion about ethics in general. An «ethical proposition» is no more than a «personal act», but it is like an «exclamation of admiration». Trying to find a basis for an ethical act is no more than reducing it to other acts that «make an impression on you. If in the end you don't have disgust for this & admiration for that, then there is no justification worthy of that name.»²¹ If it is a matter of adopting a system of coordinates to change my life, if there is a primacy of praxis over theory, then the significance of the stories in which a miraculous event appears, or of tales in which a witch transforms a human being into a wild animal!, or the impression produced by a life so exemplary that one may set it up as a model, is not independent of the life of the believer, his aversions and admirations, and his prior moral (or religious) sensibility. Nothing can compel someone to believe – to adopt that system of coordinates – if the believer does not make a place for that story in his life. In *Movements of Thought*, referring to Kierkegaard, he says:

I represent a life for you & now see how you relate to it, whether it tempts (urges) you to live like that as well, or what other relation to it you attain. Through this representation I would like to as it were loosen up your life.²²

I think that Wittgenstein maintained this point of view until his last days. Indeed, in a note in 1944 in *Culture and Value* Wittgenstein comes back to the conception of miracles that I have expounded, not in general but referring to himself. An example of a miracle might be for a «saint» to speak and for the trees around him to bow down before him in a kind of reverence. But he adds «Now, do I believe that this happens? I don't.» And he continues:

The only way for me to believe in a miracle in this sense would be to be impressed by an occurrence in this particular way. So that I should say e.g.: 'It was impossible to see these trees & not

20. Wittgenstein, L. *Movements of Thought*, op. cit., 81–83.

21. Wittgenstein, L. *Movements of Thought*, op. cit., 85.

22. Wittgenstein, L., op. cit., 83.

to feel that they were responding to the words? Just as I might say 'It is impossible to see the face of this dog & not to see that he is alert & full of attention to what his master is doing'. And I can imagine that the mere report of the *words* & life of a saint can make someone believe the reports that the trees bowed. But I am not so impressed.²³

Thus, what impresses some does not impress others, and «miracles», inasmuch as they are narratives of strange or spectacular events, are not a proof of anything and do not have universal significance. The believer does not need them to sustain his faith, and they will not convince the non-believer.²⁴ Therefore, the transforming ability of miracles refers both *to what they express* and *to the person who receives what is expressed*, and only thus can one gauge the degree to which something may be «miraculous» for someone, for it depends on the extent to which it affects and transforms him. If someone does not marvel at the opening of a blossom or the presence of a crystal, no amount of talk will lead him to change his blindness. However, the *sine qua non* condition for being able to be affected is an artistic way of considering (*künstlerische Betrachtungsweise*), on which I shall dwell in the following section.

Flashing aspects

In paragraph XI of the second part of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein concerns himself with studying the grammar of the various expressions that belong to the language game of «to see». He sets out from two cases in which the verb «to see» is used, in which it is possible to distinguish two different meanings of the term, depending on the different «category» of what is seen: in one case, someone sees a particular thing, for example, a face; in the second case, someone not only sees a face but also sees the *likeness* between that face and another one. In this second case, on seeing the likeness of one face to another, which Wittgenstein calls the experience of «noticing an aspect», one might say that nothing has changed in the perception of the features of the face, and yet it is seen *differently*. Simply from the kind of example that Wittgenstein analyses, it is clear that his investigation is not of a causal nature, nor, therefore, is it a study of experimental psychology; it is a conceptual reflection. As we know, his meditation goes on to analyse the expressions that concern the perception of ambiguous figures – such as Jastrow's famous duck/rabbit – which Wittgenstein contrasts with figures that can be described in a neutral way without committing oneself to any interpretation

23. Wittgenstein, L. *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, 67–68.

24. In this regard, Wittgenstein differs from Tolstoy without completely disagreeing with him. In the preface to *The Gospel in Brief*, Tolstoy says that he will omit everything that impedes concentrating on Jesus's doctrine as a doctrine that gives meaning to life. Accordingly, he omits everything connected with miracles because they are «fragile» stories and unnecessary for someone who already believes in the divinity of Jesus (he explicitly mentions the exclusion of the miracles of Cana, Capernaum, etc.). However, Wittgenstein does not entirely exclude the experience to which the miracles give rise, which he considers a possible religious (and moral) experience, if it is treated from a *künstlerische Betrachtungsweise*.

(as in the case of the drawing of a triangle, for which Wittgenstein suggests as many as seven descriptions: a triangular hole, a mountain, an arrow or pointer, half a parallelogram, etc.).

Very soon the analysis takes on a dimension that goes beyond mere visual perception and that could be understood as a model for a broader field of cognitive acts connected with the language games of the various meanings of «see», «perceive», «consider», etc.²⁵ The affinities between expressions such as «I see it as», «I imagine it as», «I consider it as», «I represent it to myself as», etc. are due to the fact that the way of seeing the world involves thinking or our general view of the world.²⁶ Wittgenstein himself says that his analysis applies to a modified concept of sensation which is not the ordinary one: a sensation that does not depend on any specific sensory organ, and by which we capture intentional attitudes such as emotions or desires, and also qualities connected with psychological predicates involved in aesthetic consideration: the sadness or timidity of a face and of a portrait of it, or the plaintive sound of a melody.²⁷ In a preparatory text for section XI of *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein makes it clear that the «seeing» that is involved is not confined to the mere seeing of visual perception, but that it extends to the interpretative «seeing» of which one can speak when considering artistic appreciation:

I could say of one of Picasso's pictures that I don't *see* it as human. Or of many another picture that for a long time I wasn't able to see what it was representing, but now I do. Isn't this similar to: for a long time I couldn't hear this as of a piece, but now I hear it that way. Before, it sounded

25. See Jacurzynski, W. *La idea de perspectiva en Filosofía, Antropología y Literatura*, CIESAS, Publicaciones de la Casa Chata, 2015, 83 and note 5 and Brinker, M. "Seeing as' and the Referential Reading of Fiction", in Haller, R. (ed.) *Aesthetics. Proceedings of the 8th International Wittgenstein Symposium*, Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, Vienna, 1984, 194.

26. See Jacurzynski, W. *La idea de perspectiva...*, op. cit., 194.

27. «For how could I see that this posture was hesitant before I knew that it was a posture and not the anatomy of the animal? But surely that only means that I cannot use *this* concept to describe the object of sight, just because it has *more* than purely visual reference? – Might I not for all that have a purely visual concept of a hesitant posture, or of a timid face? Such a concept would be comparable with 'major' and 'minor' which certainly have emotional value, but can also be used purely to describe a perceived structure. The epithet 'sad', as applied for example to the outline face, characterizes the grouping of lines in a circle. Applied to a human being it has a different (though related) meaning. (But this does *not* mean that a sad expression is *like* the feeling of sadness!) Think of this too: I can only see, not hear, red and green, – but sadness I can hear as much as I can see it. Think of the expression 'I heard a plaintive melody'. And now the question is: 'Does he *hear* the plaint?' And if I reply: 'No, he doesn't hear it, he merely has a sense of it' – where does that get us? One cannot mention a sense-organ for this 'sense'. Some would like to reply here: 'Of course I hear it!' – Others: 'I don't really *hear* it.' We can, however, establish differences of concept here. We react to the visual impression differently from someone who does not recognize it as timid (in *the full* sense of the word). – But I do *not* want to say here that we feel this reaction in our muscles and joints and that this is the 'sensing'. – No, what we have here is a modified concept of *sensation*. One might say of someone that he was blind to the *expression* of a face.» Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, 1999, II, XI, pp. 209^e–210^e.

like so many little bits, which were always stopping short – now I hear it as an organic whole. (Bruckner.)²⁸

So I think that Wittgenstein's analysis of the perception of aspects and of «seeing as...» is applicable to his conception of miracles. Or, to put it another way: one can understand the comprehension of miracles as a «seeing as...» that is applied to systems of symbols. Furthermore, in this particular case it is not important to observe the distinctions between «seeing as», «seeing in» and «seeing with» that are discussed when it is a matter of switching from a reflection about the gaze to a reflection about the image.²⁹ But it is important to point out that the distinction of «seeing in» is, in fact, introduced by Richard Wollheim in the second edition of *Art and its Objects* to face the fact that «seeing as» is not specific to pictorial perception. Moreover, it is not my intention to establish a strict identity between the application of «seeing as» to visual perception and to the case of miracles. It is obvious that there are notable differences between the ways of looking and seeing in the case of religion and miracles and when what is concerned is a material object or a visual image.³⁰ I simply wish to point out that the application of these concepts helps us to understand Wittgenstein's conception of miracles and its relationship to the artistic way of considering.

However, let's take it one step at a time, and let's go back to the kind of perception of ambiguous figures with which Wittgenstein's analysis begins.

The concept of «seeing...» is bound up with the notions of «continuous seeing» and the «dawning» of an aspect. When I look at the figure of the duck/rabbit it is possible that at first I continuously see only one of the aspects that constitute the picture: for example, a rabbit. However, «something» happens – perhaps a suggestion made by another person who is looking at it – and suddenly an aspect of the picture that I had not noticed previously flashes or shines out. Nothing has changed and yet something has changed: I see differently because I see what I was seeing – which is still the same strokes, the same colours, etc. – as something different that I did not see before. And the fact that I see something different is displayed in public features of my behaviour. Ranging from 'fine shades of behaviour',³¹ such as the expression of my voice and face and gestures, and my skill in repeating the picture (now comparatively greater than before when I did not see), to a notable change in attitude and in the course of my behaviour. Because after I have seen a new aspect I am capable of making applications and uses of the figure of which I was incapable before; like the child

28. Wittgenstein, L. *Last writings on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Vol I, Blackwell, 1982–1990, #677.

29. See Alloa, E., "Seeing-as, Seeing-in, Seeing-with: Looking through Images" in Heinrich, R., Nemeth, E., Pichler, W., and Wagner, D. (eds.) *Image, and imagining in Philosophy, Science and the Arts*, Vol I, 2010.

30. «While seeing-as can easily be translated into similar expressions devoid of any sensory dimension such as 'interpreting-as' or 'understanding-as', the situated visual discrimination can only be made in front of the object. As opposed to linguistically mediated learning of the propositional content of the 'as', the discrimination is made along lines within the artefact.» Alloa, "Seeing-as...", *op. cit.*, 183.

31. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical investigations*, *op. cit.*, II^a, #XI, 207e.

with a cardboard box who says «it's a house» and acts in a complex way as if it were a house because he sees it like that.

Now let's go back to miracles. We have seen that religion consists of a series of «messages» – and miracles are part of those messages – that have the apparent form of a historical narrative, but one that must not be treated like any other paradigmatic historical narrative (see note 6). In this regard, Wittgenstein compares the attitude that we must have to such messages to the attitude that we have to different forms of fiction (see note 7).

What is more, strictly speaking, miracles are not events or, to put it in another way, any ordinary event can be seen as miraculous. Whether an event can be considered as a miracle depends on adopting a perspective that is the opposite of the scientific way of considering. A perspective that has as a condition a kind of admiring and amazed consideration akin to the artistic way of considering (see notes 10 and 11).

That is why the gesture that embodies the spirit of the person who performs the miracle and that is connected with the image that we have of his life may be that of a saint (Christ at Cana in Galilee in Dostoyevsky's story) or a literary character, as in the case of a fairy tale where, for example, a witch transforms a human being into an animal (see note 13).

It is this admiring and amazed gaze that *suddenly* helps one to grasp the meaning of the gesture constituted by the miracle by perceiving it in the light of a new aspect (Alyosha suddenly sees the transformation of water into wine in the light of a new aspect: that what Christ extolled was that one who loves men loves their gladness, that without gladness it is impossible to live, and that what is beautiful and true is full of forgiveness). In other words, the transforming impression of the miracle due to the picture that we have of the life of the person who performs it establishes a new perspective from which to consider and value the world and our life.

However, this transforming impression of our way of valuing is not guaranteed, not everybody sees the same event as a miracle. Where, for some, an aspect flashes, others may be «blind». Wittgenstein put himself as an example. Just as he says that for some time he could not «see» a picture by Picasso as something human or a work by Bruckner as an organic whole, he also says that he could not see as a miracle the story of the trees bowing down in reverence in response to the words of a saint. The examples of Picasso and Bruckner involve a kind of *temporary* blindness that is revealed in the change of aspect: at a certain moment he begins to perceive the two things in the same way and at the same time differently: the strokes and smears are now seen as a picture, the unconnected fragments of music as an organic whole. But the case of the story of the saint and the trees involves a permanent blindness. Wittgenstein says that in order to consider this event as a miracle it would be necessary to be able to *see* the trees and at the same time «feel» their movement as a response to the saint's words, like the way in which one cannot fail to see in a dog's face an expectant attitude in relation to his master.³² Well, in an equivalent way that someone may be unable to recognise the sadness of a face or the expectant attitude of a dog with regard to his master, someone may be blind to the possibility of seeing an event as miraculous in an absolute sense and may see it

32. See note 23.

merely as an extraordinary event awaiting an explanation, i.e., in a relative sense. This person will react differently to someone who does so because his sensation, «a modified concept of *sensation*», is different.³³

However, Wittgenstein says that, although it is not his case, he can «*imagine*» that someone may believe in the bowing of the trees after becoming acquainted with the «*words & life*» of the saint.

The imagination becomes involved because «Now I see it as a...» goes with «I am trying to see it as a...» or «I can't see it as a... yet».³⁴ Elsewhere he says that «the concept 'I am now seeing it as...' is akin to 'I am now having this image'. «Seeing an aspect and imagining are subject to the will.»³⁵ However, someone having the desire to see something as something in accordance with an image, in our case the desire to see something as a miracle that is related to the picture of a life, does not depend solely on the will. Basically it depends on a relation of exteriority or strangeness, because I would not say of a conventionally portrayed lion (or of some knives and forks on a table) that I *see it as if it were* a lion (or that I see them *as if they were* knives and forks).³⁶ However, this exteriority and strangeness may come not only from the ambiguity of the picture or from how it is represented but also from the way in which we look. In the case of the miracles, as we have repeated, this strangeness corresponds to a kind of admiring and amazed consideration akin to the artistic way of considering and unlike the way in which science asks questions.

In this respect there is a particularly significant passage in *Culture and Value* (1930) which, despite the 17 years between them, is related to that other passage in which he comments on the different attitude to what he calls «miracles of nature» (a crystal, or a blossom opening out). In the passage written in 1930 Wittgenstein meditates on an experience that Engelmann had: when he looked at a drawer full of his manuscripts and letters they looked so glorious that he would have liked to present them to other people, but when he tried to make a selection the charm was lost and he gave up the attempt. Wittgenstein says that Engelmann sees his letters and manuscripts as splendid because «he is *seeing* his life as God's work of art, & and as such it is certainly worth contemplating, as is every life & everything whatever» (which is precisely the way in which any event is considered as miraculous: a blossom opening out, etc.). In order to convey Engelmann's experience, which Wittgenstein understands, he suggests that we should *imagine* a theatre where we see someone walking up and down on the stage in an ordinary way, just as anyone behaves on any day in his life. We would be seeing «from outside» (*von außen*), suddenly (*plötzlich*), a «chapter from a biography». It would be

33. «We react to the visual impression differently from someone who does not recognize it as timid (in the full sense of the word).-But I do *not* want to say here that we feel this reaction in our muscles and joints and that this is the 'sensing'. – No, what we have here is a modified concept of *sensation*. One might say of someone that he was blind to the *expression* of a face.» Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.* II, XI, pp. 209e–210e. See the whole of note 24.

34. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, II, XI, 206e.

35. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical...*, *op. cit.*, 213^a.

36. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical...*, *op. cit.*, 206e and 195e.

«uncanny» (*unheimlich*) and «wonderful» («*wunderbar*»).³⁷ But what is there in this scene that is special if what we see in it is what we see every day without being impressed by it? Yes, but we do not see it from the «right perspective» (*Perspektive*). The right perspective is the one that is established by the artist or requires the work of art, and among other characteristics it involves a way of seeing that makes *epoché* of the material determinations of the object – in this case letters and manuscripts – by means of a warm, happy way of looking,³⁸ without prejudice (*unvoreingenommen*) and enthusiastic in advance (*vorher begeistert zu sein*).³⁹ This is the ultimate reason why Wittgenstein does not consider miracles as extraordinary alterations of the causal sequences of events in the world, because the work of art, the way of seeing that it implies and involves, is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*, that is, seen from outside, outside space and time, with the whole world as background.⁴⁰

If Wittgenstein says, here and there, with regard to the perception of visual aspects, that it is necessary to have a particular disposition or attitude or ability acquired by training, then for the perception of the aspect that is revealed when something is seen as a miracle in an absolute sense it is necessary to have a particular moral sensibility. However, in the same way that «Aspect-blindness will be akin to the lack of a ‘musical ear’»,⁴¹ someone who is blind to considering the miraculous will be deprived of *the ability to cast beyond the works of art* an admiring and amazed look, one that is warm and happy, without prejudice and enchanted (*die künstlerische Betrachtungsweise*). And in the same way that «the ‘aspect-blind’ will have an altogether different relation to pictures from ours»,⁴² the miracle-blind will have an attitude to life that is totally different from that of someone who is not miracle-blind.

37. «... so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes,--surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful» Wittgenstein, L., *Culture and Value*, *op. cit.*, 6–7. My emphasis.

38. See note 1. Happy, i.e., reconciled with the world.

39. *Op. cit.*, «But only the artist can represent the individual thing so that it appears to us as a work of art; those manuscripts *rightly* lose their value if we contemplate them singly & in any case without *prejudice*, i.e. without being enthusiastic about them in advance. The work of art compels us – as one might say – to see it in the right perspective, but without art the object is a piece of nature like any other...»

40. «The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connexion between art and ethics. The usual way of looking at things sees objects as if were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside. In such a way that they have the whole world as background. Is this it perhaps -- in this view the object is seen together with space and time instead of in space and time? Wittgenstein, L., *Notebooks 1914–1916*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

41. Wittgenstein, L. *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, II, #XI, p. 214e.

42. *Loc. cit.*