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The Miracles Argument

One of the most important and influential argument for scientific realism is the miracles argument. It is widely regarded as a powerful motivation for scientific realism. The name “miracles” comes from Putnam’s claim that realism is the only philosophy that does not make the success of science a miracle. The miracle argument is ordinarily viewed as an inference to the best explanation, which means realism about science is the best explanation of the success of science, which would otherwise be “miraculous”.

In order to explain the miracles argument better, we need to first explain what is the “inference to the best explanation”. The rough idea is that the fact that a hypothesis best explains some observable fact provides us with good reason to accept the hypothesis. For example, when we see the sidewalk is wet, we will consider that it may be rainy, or if we hear some squeaking noise, and see the cheese missing, we will know that there may be mouse in the house. Such inference seems exceedingly common in science! In Musgrave’s view, the general structure of inference to the best explanation has four parts: first, it is reasonable to believe that the best available explanation of any fact is true. F is a fact. Second, Hypothesis H explains F. Third, no available competing hypothesis explains F as well as H does. Fourth, therefore, it is reasonable to believe that H is true.

So, for the miracles argument, inference to the best explanation(IBE) applied to scientific realism itself, not only some specific scientific phenomena. The argument supposes that the fact can be explained whether science is predictively successful. However, there are some objections for this argument.

The first objection is that IBE is not an acceptable kind of argument. This objection contains one concern that it is not a valid form of argument in the technical sense. According to this objection, IBE does not guarantee the truth of a hypothesis, instead, it just reasonable to believe the hypothesis. The second objection is that it seems that scientific realism is not the best explanation of scientific success. Musgrave mentions that empirical adequacy of our best theories explains the predictive success of these theories.