

Park, Seungbae (forthcoming). “Inference to the Best Explanation, Naturalism, and Theism,” *Implicit Religion*.

Abstract

De Ray argues that relying on inference to the best explanation (IBE) requires the metaphysical belief that most phenomena have explanations. I object that instead the metaphysical belief requires the use of IBE. De Ray uses IBE himself to establish theism that God is the cause of the metaphysical belief, and thus he has the burden of establishing the metaphysical belief independently of using IBE. Naturalism that the world is the cause of the metaphysical belief is preferable to theism, contrary to what de Ray thinks.

1. Introduction

A perennial question in philosophy of religion is whether God exists or not. Theists affirm that God exists, while naturalists deny that God exists. Naturalism is the view that natural entities such as apples and black holes exist, while supernatural entities such as God and heaven do not (Stone, 2008, p. 1). By contrast, theism maintains that supernatural entities exist as well as natural entities. Christophe de Ray (2021), who operates under these definitions of “naturalism” and “theism,” constructs an original argument for theism. This paper aims to undermine his argument and to present an argument for naturalism.

De Ray’s argument for theism goes roughly as follows. We believe that the world is (overall) intelligible, i.e., “facts generally have explanations for their obtaining” (de Ray, 2020, p. 2). In other words, we believe that most phenomena have explanations. We believe, for example, that there is an explanation for the phenomenon that an apple falls down, and that there is also an explanation for the phenomenon that a material object has mass. Why do we believe that most phenomena have explanations? What is the cause of this belief? This question is not about what justifies the belief but rather about what produces the belief. There are two rival answers. According to naturalism, the world is the cause of the belief; according to theism, God is the cause of the belief.¹ De Ray argues that theism better explains why we hold the belief than does naturalism.

The outline of the present paper is as follows. In Section 2, I define several technical terms that are used in subsequent sections. In Section 3, I unpack and criticize de Ray’s objection to naturalism that it has a disagreeable consequence. In Section 4, I attempt to refute de Ray’s further objection that the world cannot be the cause of the belief. In Section 5, I argue that de Ray is hoist with his own petard. Specifically, I argue that the theoretical resources that he has developed to refute naturalism backfire on theism that he accepts. In Section 6, I argue that naturalism has two advantages over theism. In the end, readers will see that naturalism is preferable to theism, *pace* de Ray.

References

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¹ The idea that God is the origin of beliefs is held by some cognitive scientists of religion (Barrett, 2004; Clark and Barrett, 2011; Calvin, 2016).

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