

PHIL 101
Winter 2008
Self, World,
& God

A Case Study

- My 102 final
- Context of the exam
- The late submissions
- Several pages word-for-word identical
- My initial action
- Visit from the young woman
- My diagnosis
- My subsequent actions
- Making my case – presenting evidence

Inference to the Best Explanation

THE RECIPE

- i. Put the argument -- the other person's evidential case -- into schematic form.
- ii. List as many reasonable rival explanations as you can think of.
- iii. Rank order the alternative (original and rivals) explanations from most plausible to least
- iv. See if the original explanation is in first place. If it is, you have good, or at least, some, evidence for that theory. If it is not, if one of the rivals is a better explanation, you have poor, or perhaps no, evidence for the original theory.

Schematic Form

E₁. Johnson assigned a take-home essay in his Introductory Ethics course.

E₂. Two of the answers were substantially the same -- they included lengthy passages that were word-for-word identical.

E₃. One student completed her exam, gave it to her friend to turn in, and left town.

E₄. The other student turned in the identical exams.

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T₀. The one student copied the exam answer from his friend after she gave it to him.

Rival Explanations

- T₁. The young lady broke into her friend's computer and stole his answer before giving her paper to him.
- T₂. Both students independently, and coincidentally, copied their answers from some published source.
- T₃. Both students composed their answers independently; it was a freak coincidence that the answers were substantially identical.
- T₄. Both students possessed extraordinary degrees of ESP. One student was unconsciously reading the mind of the other as they composed their answers.

Rank Ordering

- The original and the rivals
- Rank ordering:

T₀
T₂
T₁
T₄
T₃

- Dispassionate analysis, not preference
- What if others disagree?
- Intersubjectivity as the goal

Evidence Evaluation

- What is the BEST explanation?
 - If one of the rivals is a better explanation, then the evidence fails – it is poor, or non-existent
 - If the original is the best (you can think of), then there is some evidence – maybe just some, and maybe very strong
 - How close is the next nearest alternative?
- Is this objective? -- Probably not
- Can one of the rivals actually be true? -- Yes!

Use and explain inference to the best explanation in order to assess the quality of the evidence presented in the following argument.



Dick is clearly cheating on Jane. The last three times Jane called him there was no answer. Dick is always overly friendly with other women, and Jane has even caught him leering. Now Dick has broken a date with Jane, claiming to be under the weather. And if all of this were not enough, Jane's friend Sally saw Dick's car at Joe's Bar two nights ago when Dick had said he had to work late.

SCHEMATIZING THE ARGUMENT



- e₁. The last three times Jane called him there was no answer.
- e₂. Dick is always overly friendly with other women.
- e₃. Jane has caught him leering.
- e₄. Dick has broken a date with Jane, claiming to be under the weather.
- e₅. Sally saw Dick's car at Joe's Bar two nights ago when Dick had said he had to work late.

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- t₀. Dick is cheating on Jane.

RIVAL EXPLANATIONS



- t₁. Dick was under the weather. Stopped by for a drink after work.
- t₂. Dick loaned his car to Charlie.
- t₃. Dick wants to end the affair but is still faithful.
- t₄. Dick is overly friendly and leers, but it was a coincidence that he was ill and missed Jane's calls.
- t₅. Some combination of the above.

RIVAL EXPLANATIONS



- Must deny the original conclusion
- Explanatory stories can always be expanded
- Rivals can be combined
- Try to find plausible, challenging, rivals

EVALUATION OF THE EVIDENCE FOR DICK'S CHEATING



- None of them were better
- But I'm not sure the original was any better than:
 - t₅. Some combination of the above
- What do we do about ties?
- Very shaky evidence
- Virtue in acquiring more data

Dear Editor,

It just could be that the belts men are wearing to hold up their pants are interfering with the digestive system.

When men wore suspenders they lived as long as women did. Just about 25 years after they quit wearing suspenders and started wearing belts, they began dying nine years younger than the women. Is it just a coincidence that in the Middle West, where men wear bib overalls, people live longer?

The only statistics I have are my own family, having been born on a farm in northeast Kansas. Naturally all us boys wore bib overalls. All four boys have worn bib overalls to this day. Our average age is 84 with two still alive.

I should add that there never were any smokers in our family, and that we all went into the parlor every night a 9 o'clock where we formed a circle and told God how we loved him for being so good to us.

For a long life men I would say: Don't wear belts, don't smoke and do your best to keep the Commandments.

Earnest Andrus
Homeland

SCHEMATIZING THE ARGUMENT

- e₁. When men wore suspenders they lived as long as women did.
- e₂. Just about 25 years after they quit wearing suspenders and started wearing belts, they began dying nine years younger than the women.
- e₃. In the Middle West, where men wear bib overalls, people live longer.
- e₄. Boys wore bib overalls. All four boys have worn bib overalls to this day. Average age is 84 with two still alive
- e₅. No smokers in the family.
- e₆. Prayed every night.
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- t₀. The belts men are wearing to hold up their pants are interfering with the digestive system.

RIVAL EXPLANATIONS



- t₁. Midwest has healthier diet and life style.
- t₂. Power of prayer.
- t₃. Family's genetic heritage
- t₄. Some combination of the above.
- t₅. Correlation between change sex-based mortality differential and change in fashion is simply a coincidence.
- t₆. Men did not begin to die early, women began to live longer.

My Rank Order



- t₆. Men did not begin to die early, women began to live longer.
- t₅. Correlation between change sex-based mortality differential and change in fashion is simply a coincidence.
- t₄. Some combination of the above and below.
- t₃. Family's genetic heritage
- t₁. Midwest has healthier diet and life style.
- t₂. Power of prayer.
- t₀. The belts men are wearing to hold up their pants are interfering with the digestive system.

**ASSESSMENT OF
THE QUALITY OF THE
EVIDENCE**



Since there is a much better explanation of the change in the mortality statistics, as well as the anecdotal data from his family, the letter writer's evidence is very poor.