

## **The Inference to the Best Explanation**

### **Relevance of the Closest Competitor**

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When trying to explain a phenomenon, either in everyday life or in a scientific context, we often have to choose between a number of possible explanations. How can we make this choice in a rational manner when several explanations look equally plausible in light of the evidence? One suggested solution is that we should take into account the explanatory power of the explanations being examined: we are warranted in believing, or considering as closer to the truth, the explanation with the best explanatory power. But what does it mean for an explanation to be the best? Criteria such as the simplicity of the explanation, or its coherence with background knowledge or its scope have been suggested, but they are themselves fairly vague. It remains uncertain how we actually evaluate and compare explanatory-goodness, and whether comparing explanations influences the degree to which we believe in the best explanation. I will present a series of experiments that are meant to investigate how the introduction of a second best, less plausible explanation affects people's confidence in the best explanation.