

Defeaters Without Confirmation — 38

Elimination, Redistribution, and Discrimination in Negative Apologetics

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Central claim

Rival elimination, probability redistribution, and comparative discrimination are different achievements. Defeating one rival can raise Christianity's probability in a closed model, but Christianity gains on the surviving field only when the evidence is more expected under Christianity than under that field. Negative apologetics can remove an obstacle or contribute to a cumulative case; rival elimination alone cannot select Christianity from an unstated set of alternatives.

Preview:

Rival elimination	Probability redistribution	Comparative discrimination	Warranted conclusion
Evidence counts against the named rival <i>R</i> .	In a closed partition, Christianity <i>C</i> and the other survivors <i>O</i> may both rise as <i>R</i> falls.	<i>C</i> gains on <i>O</i> only when the evidence is more expected under <i>C</i> than under <i>O</i> .	Rival defeat can remove an obstacle; selecting <i>C</i> requires the missing comparative support.

Throughout, “confirmation” means discriminating support for Christianity over live survivors; standard probability-raising confirmation is the redistribution step.

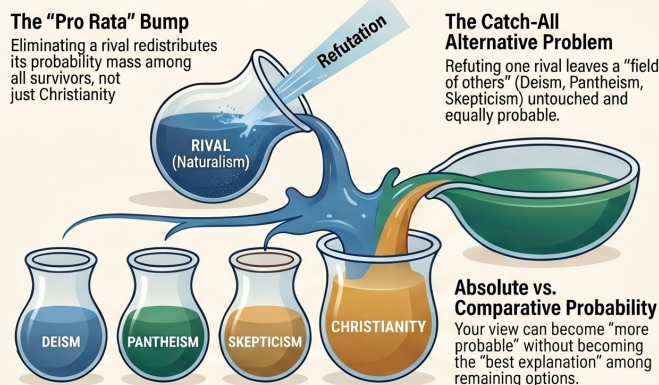
Visual preview:

Beyond “Refutation”: The Probabilistic Limits of Negative Apologetics

The Illusion of Progress

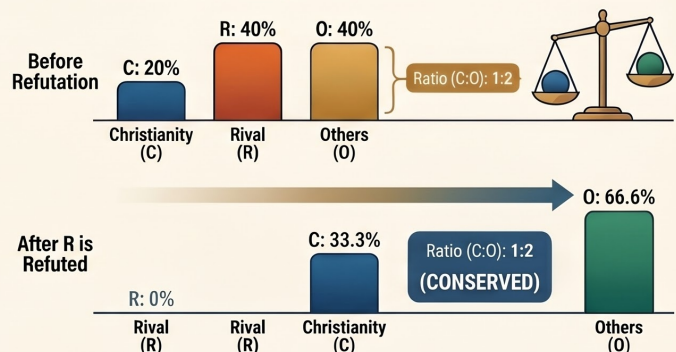
The “Pro Rata” Bump

Eliminating a rival redistributes its probability mass among all survivors, not just Christianity



The Surviving-Odds Conservation Theorem (F2)

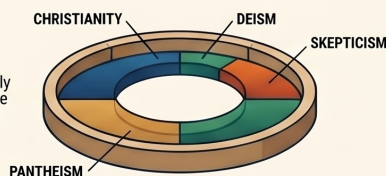
The ratio between Christianity and “Other” remains identical after a rival is removed.



The Requirements for Real Confirmation

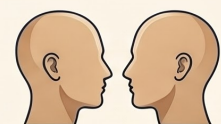
Partition Discipline Principle (PDP)

An argument must explicitly state which alternatives are being compared to avoid false dilemmas.



Explanatory Specificity (ESR)

Evidence must favor specific Christian doctrines over generic theism or rival revelations.



Symmetrical Defeater Condition (SDC)

You must apply the same critical standards to your own worldview as your rivals.

The preserved 20/40/40 visual separates the same three events: *R* is eliminated, *C* and *O* rise by renormalization, yet the *C:O* odds remain 1:2. Read its lower chart as *R* = 0%, *C* = 33.3%, and *O* = 66.6%. Its phrase “equally probable” means unchanged comparative odds, not equal priors or real-world estimates.

Abstract

Rival criticism can eliminate a rival, redistribute probability among survivors, and discriminate among survivors. Negative apologetics often moves from the first or second achievement to the third without supplying the missing comparison. This paper separates the three by comparing a Christian hypothesis with a named rival and a catch-all field of other live views. Bayes' theorem shows that Christianity's posterior odds against that field equal its prior odds multiplied by a likelihood ratio. The principal result is general: however badly the rival fares, evidence that is equally expected under Christianity and the surviving field leaves their odds unchanged. In the strongest idealized case, the rival falls to zero and Christianity rises in absolute probability, yet Christianity gains no ground on the field. Five pressures reinforce this conclusion: odds conservation, hypothesis-space closure, doctrinal specificity, symmetry of testing, and contrastive explanation. The result is bounded. Negative apologetics can remove a local obstacle, settle a genuinely binary dispute, or contribute to a cumulative case. Discriminating confirmation requires stated alternatives and evidence more expected under Christianity than under them.

Keywords: negative apologetics; Bayesian confirmation; defeaters; hypothesis space; Christianity; religious epistemology; inference to the best explanation

1. What This Paper Asks Readers to Stop Inferring

Negative apologetics begins with a legitimate intellectual task: test a rival claim and identify where it fails. That task is *elimination*. A closed probability model may then raise the probabilities of the surviving views by renormalization; that is *redistribution*. The trouble begins when elimination or redistribution is counted as *discrimination*—evidence that selects Christianity over what remains. A problem for naturalism, Islam, moral relativism, materialism, deism, or some other position is entered on a mental scoreboard as a point for Christianity. Enough losses by enough rivals are then treated as a positive case for the favored survivor. This paper asks Christian apologists and their audiences to stop making that promotion automatically.

The governing thesis is precise. A successful defeater for one rival is not, by itself, discriminating evidence for Christianity over the alternatives that survive. The rival's loss can matter. It can narrow a real decision, remove an obstacle, or raise Christianity's probability in a closed model. But the further conclusion that Christianity is now the best-supported account requires evidence that favors it over what remains.

Terminology matters. *Theism* is the general position that at least one deity exists. A *God-concept* is a specified conception of a deity, including the attributes, intentions, actions, and revelations assigned to it. Christianity is not merely theism. It includes historically and doctrinally specific commitments. Evidence against reductive naturalism might, in principle, favor some form of theism. That result would not yet select a Christian God-concept over deism, non-Christian theisms, idealism, panpsychism, or other non-reductive accounts.

The title is therefore compact rather than terminologically complete. Standard Bayesian accounts often say that evidence confirms a hypothesis whenever it raises that hypothesis's probability (Crupi, 2025; Joyce, 2021). Under that relevance definition, elimination of a probability-bearing rival can incrementally confirm every survivor. The present target is stronger: *discriminating confirmation*, evidence that improves Christianity's standing against the live alternatives that remain. The paper does not deny the thin incremental update. It denies that the update, by itself, identifies the winner.

The three-part distinction preserves the useful part of negative apologetics while removing its rhetorical inflation. The requested intellectual change is simple: after showing that a rival is in trouble and noting any probability increase for Christianity, ask one more question before claiming comparative support—why is the defeating evidence more expected if the Christian hypothesis is true than if another survivor is true?

2. Three Questions Rival Defeat Cannot Collapse

Bayesian reasoning makes the missing comparison visible. Let C represent the Christian hypothesis under examination, R a named rival, O the disjunction of all other live alternatives, and E the evidence said to defeat R . The posterior probability of C is

$$P(C | E) = \frac{P(E | C)P(C)}{P(E | C)P(C) + P(E | R)P(R) + P(E | O)P(O)}. \quad (1)$$

This equation contains three questions that apologetic rhetoric often merges.

1. **Elimination: Did the rival lose?** This concerns how poorly R predicts or accommodates E .
2. **Redistribution: Did Christianity rise in absolute probability?** This compares $P(C | E)$ with $P(C)$.
3. **Discrimination: Did Christianity improve against the surviving field?** This compares the posterior odds of C to O with their prior odds.

These are the paper's governing distinctions. Elimination concerns the target rival, redistribution concerns Christianity's probability relative to its own prior, and discrimination concerns Christianity relative to the other survivors. The first can be true without settling the third. The second can also be true without settling the third. Posterior odds make this especially clear:

$$\frac{P(C | E)}{P(O | E)} = \frac{P(E | C)}{P(E | O)} \times \frac{P(C)}{P(O)}. \quad (2)$$

The first ratio on the right is the Bayes factor comparing Christianity with the surviving field. If that ratio exceeds one, E favors C over O . If it equals one, their odds do not change. Notice what is absent from this odds equation: R . Whether the evidence weakens R slightly or drives its probability to zero, the fate of R does not determine the $C:O$ odds. Once the question is whether Christianity gains on the survivors, the defeated rival cannot do the comparative work. This likelihood-based discipline is standard in Bayesian accounts of evidence and model comparison (Earman, 1992; Howson & Urbach, 2006; Sober, 2008).

The catch-all O is a composite alternative, not one rival theory. Its likelihood is a weighted average of the likelihoods assigned by its component views, using their relative prior weights within O . Refining those components can change the average, but it cannot remove the comparative burden. The model must formulate C , R , and the components of O so they are mutually exclusive, rather than allowing overlapping labels to masquerade as a probability partition.

The point does not depend on assigning precise numbers to whole worldviews. Numbers can make the relation vivid, as the title-page visual does, but the qualitative conclusion is enough. To claim comparative support, an argument must establish a directional likelihood claim: the evidence is more expected under Christianity than under the relevant alternatives. Showing only that the evidence is unexpected under R leaves that claim open.

3. Redistribution Without Discrimination

The odds result is general: if E is equally expected under C and O , their odds remain unchanged regardless of what happens to R . To display the strongest possible rival defeat, consider the idealized case in which E decisively eliminates R while remaining neutral between C and O :

$$P(E | R) = 0, \quad P(E | C) = P(E | O) = q > 0. \quad (3)$$

Assume that C , R , and O are mutually exclusive and exhaustive within the model, and each has positive prior probability. Then

$$P(C | E) = \frac{P(C)}{P(C) + P(O)} = \frac{P(C)}{1 - P(R)} > P(C). \quad (4)$$

Christianity rises in absolute probability. This is redistribution: a normalization effect inside the stipulated model, not a causal transfer of probability from one worldview to another. The apologist is entitled to say that E incrementally confirms C in the standard probability-raising sense. Yet the surviving odds are

$$\frac{P(C | E)}{P(O | E)} = \frac{P(C)}{P(O)}. \quad (5)$$

Christianity has not improved at all against the field that survives. It receives its proportional share of the eliminated rival's probability mass, just as O does. Elimination and redistribution have occurred; discrimination has not.

The ordinary-language core

1. **Elimination:** E decisively defeats the named rival R .
2. **Redistribution:** because R had positive prior probability, renormalization raises the absolute probability of C .
3. **Discrimination:** because E is equally expected under C and O , their odds do not change.
4. Therefore, even decisive rival defeat does not by itself establish that Christianity gained on the surviving field; that requires a favorable $C:O$ likelihood ratio.

This result is conditional, not universal. Defeating evidence could also favor Christianity over O . Suppose a Christian hypothesis independently predicts a feature whose absence or incoherence undermines R , while the surviving alternatives do not predict it as well. Then $P(E | C) > P(E | O)$, and Christianity does gain comparatively. But that gain comes from the likelihood contrast between C and O , not from the bare fact that R lost.

The distinction also prevents a subtle misuse of the word *incoherent*. If a hypothesis is logically inconsistent, a fully informed rational agent should assign it probability zero from the start. Real agents, however, can assign positive confidence to a view before recognizing a contradiction or fatal tension. Discovering the problem rationally corrects their distribution. That epistemic correction need not reveal which survivor is true. It can show that one road is closed without showing which open road reaches the destination.

4. Five Pressures on the Same Inference

The formal result is not an isolated mathematical trick. Five pressures converge on the same bounded conclusion. The first is the odds result just established; the next four concern hypothesis-space closure, doctrinal specificity, symmetry of testing, and contrastive explanation. Table 1 shows what elimination or redistribution can establish and what discrimination still requires.

4.1 The hypothesis-space pressure

Probability is redistributed within a space. If an argument models only Christianity and reductive naturalism, eliminating naturalism makes Christianity certain by construction. The mathematics is impeccable; the partition may not be. Other forms of naturalism, deism, generic theism, non-Christian theisms, idealism, neutral monism, panpsychism, skepticism, and views not yet articulated can remain live. The catch-all O exists to prevent the

Table 1: Five checks for rival-elimination arguments

Pressure	What elimination or redistribution establishes	What remains unestablished	What discrimination requires
Odds conservation	<i>R</i> loses probability; survivors may rise absolutely.	<i>C</i> need not improve against <i>O</i> .	Show $P(E \mid C) > P(E \mid O)$.
Hypothesis space	One named option is weakened or removed.	The residual field is not thereby negligible or closed.	State and justify the live partition, including a catch-all.
Specificity	A broad family or generic claim may gain.	Specifically Christian commitments do not inherit unique support automatically.	Supply evidence tied to the additional Christian content.
Symmetry	A standard can expose a real defect in a rival.	Selective exposure does not validate the favored view.	Apply comparable standards and allow Christian claims to lose probability.
Explanation	One competitor may explain the evidence poorly.	Christianity is not thereby best among all survivors.	Compare expectedness, scope, and cost across the live field.

model from silently assigning all of them probability zero. Its components must be refined into mutually exclusive alternatives whenever an exact calculation is attempted.

This is not a demand to list every logically possible worldview. Inquiry always ignores possibilities too remote or poorly motivated to matter. The demand is proportional: an argument may conclude only at the level supported by the alternatives it has responsibly compared. Work on unconceived alternatives illustrates the general risk of confusing a current menu of serious options with an exhaustive inventory of the possible (Stanford, 2006). A two-option model may be appropriate in a genuinely local dispute. It is not automatically appropriate for a global worldview conclusion. Redistribution occurs inside the chosen space; discrimination is only as credible as that space.

4.2 The specificity pressure

The more specific the conclusion, the more specific the discrimination must be. Evidence against reductive materialism might support some non-reductive account. Evidence against atheism might support theism. Neither result automatically supports the Trinity, incarnation, resurrection, biblical canon, providence, or any other specifically Christian commitment.

This is where negative apologetics often changes altitude without announcing it. The argument defeats a thin rival claim and concludes with a thick Christian package. But each additional commitment creates another comparison. Evidence that redistributes probability toward a parent class does not thereby discriminate in favor of one member. Swinburne's cumulative Bayesian defense of theism is a useful opposing model precisely because it attempts an affirmative program rather than treating rival failure as sufficient (Swinburne, 2004). Whether that program succeeds is a separate question. Its existence underscores the present point: a positive case must do more than subtract.

4.3 The symmetry pressure

A method deserves trust only if it can count against the view of the person using it. If explanatory gaps are defeaters for naturalism, comparable gaps in Christian explanation must be allowed evidential force. If moral incoherence discredits a rival God-concept, moral tensions within the Christian account must be exposed to a related standard. Different hypotheses make different claims, so symmetry does not require mechanically identical tests. It requires comparable willingness to lose.

Concerns about partisanship and asymmetric evaluation are not peculiar to popular debate; they have been raised within philosophy of religion itself (Draper & Nichols, 2013). The point here is methodological rather than

psychological. Even a perfectly sincere investigator can build a one-way testing regime. When rivals face severe tests while the favored view receives flexible reinterpretations, the resulting sequence of “defeaters” measures the testing policy as much as it measures the hypotheses. Such a policy may eliminate rivals, but it cannot discriminate fairly while the favored view is insulated from comparable loss.

4.4 The explanatory pressure

Inference to the best explanation does not escape the need for comparison. The word *best* presupposes a contrast class. Explanatory virtues can guide inference, and probabilistic accounts can connect explanatory power with how strongly an explanation raises the expectedness of the evidence (Lipton, 2004; Schupbach & Sprenger, 2011). But one rival’s weakness does not make Christianity best among every survivor.

An explanatory argument must therefore say what phenomenon needs explaining, which alternatives are serious, how each makes the evidence more or less expected, and what additional commitments each carries. Without that comparison, “Christianity explains this” may report compatibility or intellectual satisfaction rather than discriminating support. “Best” is a discriminatory conclusion, not an eliminative one.

5. When Negative Apologetics Is Genuinely Valuable

The elimination–redistribution–discrimination distinction restricts negative apologetics; it does not abolish it. Rival criticism can do at least four legitimate kinds of work.

First, it can provide a *local defeater*. If a specific claim is incoherent, contradicted by evidence, or explanatorily inferior within a justified contrast, confidence in that claim should fall. No positive theology is required for that conclusion.

Second, it can settle a *genuinely binary decision*. A person may actually face only two options in a local context: two interpretations of one text, two incompatible mechanisms, or two exhaustive answers to a narrowly specified question. When exhaustiveness is justified, eliminating one option supports the other.

Third, it can remove an *agent-relative obstacle*. A person whose live choice is temporarily between Christianity and one rival may rationally move toward Christianity when that rival fails. This psychological and epistemic fact does not turn the person’s restricted menu into a universal partition, but it can explain why the defeater matters greatly to that person.

Fourth, it can contribute to a *cumulative case*. Several independent strands can converge when each states an expectation, an observed or argued result, a comparator, and its limited contribution. Rival defeat then functions as one strand alongside affirmative evidence. The cumulative case gains strength from explicit convergence, not from a scoreboard on which every criticism of someone else is credited to Christianity.

These uses share a discipline: match the strength of the conclusion to the closure of the comparison. A local conclusion can rest on a local contrast. A global conclusion requires a broader and better defended field.

6. The Strongest Replies

6.1 “Only Christianity and this rival are serious”

Sometimes this is true for a particular conversation. A former naturalist considering Christianity may have no current interest in deism or non-Christian theism. The rival’s defeat can then change that person’s rational path. But the public conclusion must remain agent-relative unless the argument establishes that the two options are objectively exhaustive. Seriousness cannot mean merely “the options currently familiar to me.” The catch-all is a reminder that ignorance of alternatives is not evidence of their impossibility.

6.2 “Refuting a false rival must help the truth”

Yes—when the refuting evidence is neutral among the survivors of a closed partition, renormalization raises every survivor proportionally. When the evidence is not neutral, the likelihood ratios determine which survivors gain. The surviving-odds result therefore denies only the slide from *Christianity rose to the evidence selected Christianity*. The first is an absolute claim about redistribution. The second is a comparative claim that requires a favorable likelihood ratio.

6.3 “The incoherent rival should never have received a prior”

If the rival is transparently contradictory, this reply is correct. A coherent probability function should not assign positive probability to a logical impossibility. Most apologetic defeaters, however, are not formal proofs of contradiction. They concern explanatory costs, moral tensions, disputed empirical expectations, or alleged inability to ground some phenomenon. Such arguments can reduce confidence without establishing logical impossibility. Calling every serious objection an “incoherence” obscures the difference.

Even when a genuine contradiction is discovered, the update primarily repairs a mistaken prior. It still does not tell us whether Christianity, deism, skepticism, or another survivor is true. Logical hygiene is indispensable, but it is not a denominational selector.

6.4 “Enough defeated rivals leave Christianity standing”

Sequential elimination can eventually become decisive if the list is exhaustive, each defeat succeeds, and Christianity survives the same level of scrutiny. Those are substantial conditions. In an open worldview space, the residual category does not disappear merely because several named rivals do. New alternatives can be distinguished within it, old alternatives can be revised, and the favored view can acquire defeaters of its own.

This produces a useful fork:

The closure fork

Either the argument supplies a justified exhaustive field, in which case elimination can narrow that field and perhaps identify a survivor; or the field remains open, in which case the conclusion must remain local and comparative. Treating an open field as closed gives the rhetoric of proof without the evidential responsibility of closure.

6.5 “Christianity is still the best explanation”

That may be argued, but it is a new argument. It must compare Christianity with the serious survivors, identify the evidence each predicts, and account for prior cost and doctrinal specificity. Lipton’s contrastive treatment of explanation and probabilistic work on explanatory power both reinforce the same point: explanatory success is relational, not a trophy awarded when one opponent leaves the stage (Lipton, 2004; Schupbach & Sprenger, 2011).

7. A Fair Protocol for Rival-Defeat Arguments

Negative apologetics becomes more credible when it adopts a visible protocol.

1. **Name the exact target.** State whether the argument addresses one doctrine, one form of naturalism, one religious tradition, or a whole worldview family.

2. **State the conclusion before the rhetoric expands it.** Say whether the result is contradiction, disconfirmation, explanatory cost, moral pressure, or merely an unanswered question.
3. **Display the live alternatives.** Include a catch-all when the list is not demonstrably exhaustive. Explain why omitted alternatives are too remote to affect the intended conclusion.
4. **Separate elimination, redistribution, and discrimination.** Ask how E bears on R , whether $P(C | E) > P(C)$, and whether $P(E | C)/P(E | O) > 1$. A low likelihood under the rival does not answer the third question.
5. **Match evidence to specificity.** Do not move from support for non-reductive reality, generic theism, or a moral source directly to specifically Christian doctrines without additional discriminating evidence.
6. **Permit reciprocal defeat.** Identify what evidence, contradiction, or explanatory failure would lower confidence in the Christian hypothesis under examination.
7. **Report the bounded result.** Distinguish “this rival is weakened,” “Christianity rises within this model,” and “Christianity is favored over the surviving field.”

This protocol does not demand numerical pretense. Priors and likelihoods for worldviews are rarely precise. Its purpose is conceptual accountability. Even qualitative judgments can distinguish equal, greater, or lesser expectedness; open and closed partitions; thin and thick conclusions; local loss and comparative gain. The framework exposes where disagreement actually lies.

The protocol also improves persuasion. A listener can accept a successful criticism without feeling pressured to accept an unrelated conclusion. That honesty may produce a smaller immediate victory, but it produces a more trustworthy inquiry. The alternative is a worldview tournament whose bracket was drawn by the favored contestant.

8. Conclusion

Negative apologetics can eliminate a rival, redistribute probability among survivors, and—when it supplies the required comparison—discriminate among them. The mistake examined here is to treat those achievements as interchangeable. Rival defeat can expose a contradiction, lower confidence, remove an obstacle, raise Christianity’s absolute probability within a closed model, or contribute to a cumulative case. What it cannot do by itself is show that Christianity is better supported than the alternatives that survive.

The strongest reason is the simplest. Posterior odds between Christianity and the surviving field change only when the evidence is more expected under one than the other. If the defeating evidence is neutral between them, the rival can fall to zero and Christianity can rise, yet the Christianity-to-other odds remain exactly as they were. Odds conservation, hypothesis-space closure, doctrinal specificity, symmetry of testing, and contrastive explanation all reinforce that boundary.

The principal limit is equally important. This paper does not show that Christianity lacks positive evidence, that every rival-defeat argument is weak, or that an exhaustive elimination argument is impossible. It shows where the additional burden lies. A disciplined apologist should state the partition, preserve the catch-all, expose Christian claims to reciprocal risk, and demonstrate the likelihood contrast that the conclusion requires.

The reader-facing questions are therefore sequential: “Which rival has failed?” “How did the probabilities redistribute?” and “Why is this evidence more expected if Christianity is true than if another surviving view is true?” Until the third question is answered, the rival may have lost and Christianity may have risen, but the evidence has not yet shown that Christianity outranks the survivors.

A. Formal Reconstruction of the Central Thesis

A.1 Plain-language reconstruction

- P1.** Christianity's odds against the surviving alternatives improve exactly when the evidence is more expected under Christianity than under those alternatives.
- P2.** Defeating a named rival establishes how the evidence bears on that rival; by itself it establishes no likelihood comparison between Christianity and the surviving alternatives.
- P3.** A decisive rival defeat is compatible with evidence that is equally expected under Christianity and the surviving alternatives. In that neutral case, Christianity's odds against them remain unchanged even though its absolute probability can rise by renormalization.
- P4.** Therefore, rival elimination alone is insufficient to establish discriminating confirmation of Christianity. That conclusion requires a favorable likelihood comparison or a justified exhaustive field in which no other survivor remains.

Conclusion. Elimination can defeat R , and redistribution can raise $P(C)$, while discrimination still fails because the $C:O$ odds are unchanged. Rival elimination alone therefore supplies no discriminating confirmation of Christianity over the surviving field, although it can provide a thin incremental update, settle a justified binary comparison, remove an obstacle, or contribute to a broader cumulative case.

A.2 Symbols

C : the specifically Christian hypothesis under examination;

R : the named rival targeted by the defeater;

O : the disjunction of all other live alternatives in the modeled field;

E : the evidence said to defeat R ;

P : the probability function over the partition $\{C, R, O\}$;

$BF_{C:O}(E)$: the Bayes factor $P(E | C)/P(E | O)$ comparing C with O .

A.3 Symbolic reconstruction

Assume C , R , and O are mutually exclusive and exhaustive, with positive priors, and that conditioning on E is well defined. The general posterior-odds identity is

$$\frac{P(C | E)}{P(O | E)} = BF_{C:O}(E) \frac{P(C)}{P(O)}. \quad (6)$$

If the evidence is neutral between C and O , then

$$P(E | C) = P(E | O) \implies BF_{C:O}(E) = 1 \implies \frac{P(C | E)}{P(O | E)} = \frac{P(C)}{P(O)}. \quad (7)$$

This conservation result is independent of $P(E | R)$. To add the strongest idealized elimination case, suppose also that

$$P(E | R) = 0, \quad P(E | C) = P(E | O) > 0. \quad (8)$$

Bayes' theorem then gives both elimination and redistribution:

$$P(R \mid E) = 0, \tag{9}$$

$$P(C \mid E) = \frac{P(C)}{P(C) + P(O)} = \frac{P(C)}{1 - P(R)} > P(C). \tag{10}$$

Thus E eliminates R and increases the absolute probability of C while leaving the odds of C to O unchanged.

Validity. The posterior-odds identity is deductively valid, and the neutral-likelihood condition entails odds conservation. The displayed decisive-elimination model is therefore a counterexample to the inference from “ R was eliminated” to “ C improved against O .” Given zero likelihood under R , equal positive likelihood under C and O , and positive priors, both $P(R \mid E) = 0$ and the absolute increase in $P(C)$ follow from Bayes’ theorem.

Support for the premises. The mathematical premises are an idealization, not an empirical description of every apologetic dispute. Whether a real defeater makes $P(E \mid R)$ very small, whether C and O are equally predictive, and whether the modeled partition is adequate are substantive judgments. The counterexample establishes the paper’s scope limit: elimination alone is insufficient. A real argument can provide discrimination by defending a favorable $BF_{C:O}(E)$, or it can make elimination decisive by justifying a genuinely exhaustive comparison with no surviving alternative.

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