

Logic and Evidence in the Death of Paul Wellstone

Jim Fetzer (READER WEEKLY 23 October 2003, pp.13-14)

Scientific reasoning is a pattern of thinking things through that proceeds through stages of puzzlement, speculation, and adaptation, ending with (tentative and fallible) explanation. It should be applied in every context complicated and serious enough to require it, including the recent death of US Senator Paul Wellstone. When we apply scientific reasoning, we discover that the truth may not be what the papers print or what our government tells us about this event. It appears to have been another assassination. Here is an overview of what I have discovered.

PUZZLEMENT: What brought this plane down?

Something caused this crash and it was not the plane, the pilots, or the weather. That means we have to consider other, less pleasant alternatives, such as small bombs, gas canisters, or EMP (RF or HERF gun) weapons. But if we are overlooking some alternative, then even when we have eliminated the others, we may not have isolated the correct explanation. This is basic to scientific reasoning about this or any other puzzling situation. This is the stage of speculation.

What bothers me about the position of many critics is they do not have a reasonable answer to the question, "What brought this plane down?" They may not like my answer, but it certainly appears to be more reasonable than any alternatives I have heard from them, such as speculation about the weather or the pilots that has been shown to be unjustified by the evidence. And the claim that "something unexpected happened" is obvious. That, of course, is precisely what we want to explain!

If I am wrong about all of this, I would like to know. I am interested in what caused the death of Wellstone and the other occupants of the plane. If that means I was wrong, fine, because I want to know what is right. I care more about what is right than that I be right! The stages of scientific inquiry include puzzlement, speculation, adaptation, and explanation. I will outline the logical structure of my argument for further discussion. To a first approximation, the full range of possible alternative explanations would seem to be:

SPECULATION:

- (h1) mechanical problems with the plane;
- (h2) difficult weather caused the crash;
- (h3) the pilots made mistakes in flying;

(h4) something unexpected happened like:
(h4a) a prop came off and hit the plane;
(h4b) the plane hit some gaggle of geese;
(h4c) some unspecified alternative . . . ;
(h5) something unexpected happened like:
(h5a) a small bomb exploded in the plane;
(h5b) some gas canister induced a stupor;
(h5c) a ground-based weapon was employed:
(h5ci) an EMP type weapon was employed;
(h5cii) an RF type weapon was employed,
including (h5ciii) a HERF gun; or else,
(h5civ) some other type of weapon was
used . . . ;

where the distinction between (H4) and (H5)
corresponds to that between non-political
(unintentional, etc.) modes of causation
and political (intentional) modes of caus-
ation. Only at the level of (H5) are we
confronted with death by assassination.

ADAPTATION:

The evidence that leads me to take (H5)
and its alternatives seriously includes
such considerations as the following:

(h1) the plane had an excellent maintain-
ence history; no serious problems; even
the NTSB has cleared the plane of fault.

Infer: not-(h1)

(h2) the weather was not ideal but far
from serious; planes were landing there
earlier; the airport manager took off
immediately when the plane did not land;
photographs taken in the immediate area
show no signs of serious weather; a driver
in the area saw no signs of serious wea-
ther; early reports that the time were
being corrected by local reporters who
knew there was no "freezing rain", for
example, and who were pilots themselves.
That weather was a problem is improbable.

Infer: not-(h2)

(h3) there were two qualified pilots; the primary had 5,200 hours of flight time and the highest possible certification; he has passed his flight check just two days before the fatal flight; those with the most experience flying with him describe him as the most careful pilot they had ever flown with; he displayed prudence about flying on 25 October until the weather had cleared; Wellstone, who did not like to fly, was comfortable with him (implying that he was, indeed, a very cautious pilot); if something had happened to him, the copilot could have taken over; and so on.

Infer: not-(h3)

DISCUSSION: There is much additional evidence that supports the elimination of (h1), (h2), and (h3), including the NTSB's own simulations, which involved pilots from Charter Aviation and which involved simulations at much reduced speeds. None of them was able to take down the plane. It is impossible to replicate exactly the pilot variables, but there is no good reason to suppose these simulations--which appear to be consistent with the other evidence on (h1), (h2), and (h3)--are not reliable.

This means that, unless we introduce truly far-fetched alternatives, such as that both pilots wanted to commit suicide, were under the influence of LSD which had been put in the water, or some such, which are possible but very improbable, we accept the probable inference that neither the plane nor the weather nor the pilots appear to have been involved. That moves us to:

(h4) something unexpected happened like:

(h4a) a prop came off and hit the plane, except there is no evidence of that and the NTSB investigation has cleared this;

Infer: not-(h4a)

(h4b) the plane hit some gaggle of geese, except that there was not remnant of any gaggle of geese, feathers, goose parts,

or things like that present at the scene;

Infer: not-(h4b)

(h4c) some unspecified alternative . . . , which remains open-ended until some such alternative is specified for consideration;

Infer: leave (h4c) in suspense (neither accept (h4c) nor reject (h4c)).

Apart from supposing that something was the cause but we don't know what it was (an enigma wrapped in mystery shrouded in mist), to the extent to which we are rational in the formation of our beliefs, we are logically forced by all the above to consider other, more sinister, alternatives, which imply an assassination:

(h5) something unexpected happened like:

(h5a) a small bomb exploded in the plane, where, to be best of my knowledge, there have been no reports of shrapnel wounds to the bodies of the pilots, especially, since the passengers were badly burned;

Infer: not-(h5a)

(h5b) some gas canister induced a stupor, the alternative that I initially proposed, which should have left gas residues in the bodies, where no residues have been found;

Infer: not-(h5b)

(h5c) a ground-based weapon was employed, which appears to me to have been the case for reasons that I have explained below. The possible alternatives include these:

(h5ci) an EMP type weapon was employed;

(h5cii) an RF type weapon was employed;

including (h5ciii) a HERF gun; or else,

(h5ciii) some other type of weapon was used . . . (which could have been simply a lucky shot with a rifle).

The tenability for (h5c), of course, is the current locus of debate. Just notice the chain of argument that led us to this point. I am certainly no expert on EMP, RF, or HERF gun technology; and I freely

admit that I could be wrong about this;
but what other alternative explains the
other available evidence, which includes:

(e1) the anomalous cell-phone experience
of John Ongaro (which has been elaborated
in "Once More, With Feeling");

(e2) the FBI's early arrival on the scene,
(which has been elaborated in "More Ques-
tions, Fewer Answers");

(e3) the exchange of roles between the FBI
and the NTSB (also elaborated in "More Ques-
tions, Fewer Answers");

(e4) the insider's report to Michael Ruppert
that this had been a hit and that others
were likely to follow (in several columns);

not to mention the general political context,

(e5) that Wellstone had been targeted for
political elimination by the White House;

(e6) that the control of the Senate was at
stake (and observe what a difference that
has made--this was a critical issue); and,

(e7) previous attempts on Wellstone's life
(elaborated in "Why Take Him Out?")

plus considerations peculiar to this case:

(e8) the non-availability of FAA information
about planes landing at Duluth International
Airport on 25 October 2002 I had requested;

(e9) the cancellation of hearings the NTSB
ordinarily conducts to receive public input;

(e10) a flurry of reports that have "spun"
responsibility toward the pilots, when that
appears to be unjustifiable on the evidence?

So the question becomes, if I am wrong about
(h5c) (in one or another of its variations),
then what explains why this plane came down?

EXPLANATION:

Infer: This was no accident; the motives
were almost certainly political;
and the White House may have been
involved;

where this inference is both tentative (it

is subject to revision with the acquisition of further relevant evidence) and fallible (even though it may be the most rational of the alternatives, it might still be false). We are dealing with inductive reasoning in the accumulation of evidence and in appraising its logical force. While the overall structure of the argument is an argument by elimination (which is deductive in form), the principles of inference--in enumerating the possible alternatives, for example--are inductive, and the reasoning is probabilistic, as is characteristic of scientific reasoning in general. Let me be more specific.

Everyone should understand that my argument goes as far as (h5c), where I am open-minded about precisely what kind of weapon may have been used. I have speculated that it might have been an EMP weapon but I am open minded about a HERF gun. There are special considerations that lead me in this direction, which must also be taken into account on pain of violating the requirement of total evidence in searching for the truth about this event:

(e11) there was an abrupt cessation of communication commensurate with loss of control;

(e12) whatever caused the loss of control was almost certainly responsible for the cessation of communication; and,

(e13) the most likely time for this plane to have been hit is between 10:18 and 10:19.

Those who have been attacking me by disputing (e11) though (e13) are not being responsive to the evidence, especially as I have presented it in detail in "Once More, With Feeling". An alternative explanation will not be reasonable if it does not explain (e11), (e12), and (e13). This is based on the strength of the evidence that I have presented there. Those who want to deny these points are practicing unscientific reasoning by ignoring relevant evidence. A reasonable alternative has to explain them.

Other considerations that deserve further investigation include the prolonged burning of the plane and the extensive damage to the passengers. There were also initial reports of hearing a sound that could have been that of a rifle shot and the like. There are other possible sources of evidence, no doubt, that I have been unable to pursue. Even here, in summarizing the structure of my argument, I

may have inadvertently omitted other points,
but those may be found in my READER columns.

I would be glad to hear from anyone who has
a serious interest in contribute to debate. It
may be especially appropriate to relate it to
the evidence and the logical structure of the
argument that has led me to the conclusion that
this was no accident, that it appears to have
been an assassination, and that the White House
may have been involved. And, in particular, if
I'm wrong, then what caused this plane to crash?

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