

Other theories offering explanations of human behavior form evidence for arguments about topics from psychology to criminology. But theories, like facts, compete with one another. For example, two competing theories about crime and punishment, sometimes called “deterrence” and “inducement,”¹¹ offer differing explanations of which social policies will likely reduce the crime rate. The theory of deterrence, used as evidence by debaters favoring punishment as the best solution to crime, predicts that people will be less likely to commit crimes if they see the results of criminal actions costing more than not engaging in them. According to the theory of deterrence, the higher the certainty of conviction and the greater the severity of punishment, the lower will be the rate of crime.

The theory of inducement postulates that the best approach to reducing crime is to convince people that employment will pay higher dividends than crime. According to this theory, to decrease the crime rate, societies should ensure that all citizens find adequate employment. Each of these theories may be used as evidence in debates about policies designed to fight crime. While the theories are not mutually exclusive, each argues for different courses of action.

One reason theories are a persuasive category of evidence is that they offer rational explanations for the relationships between and among facts. Contrary to popular opinion, facts do not speak for themselves. They usually require explanations, and those explanations are the kinds of evidence debaters need to make their arguments persuasive. For instance, available facts suggest that Cuba has great difficulty supplying safe drinking water and has a higher-than-average incidence of morbidity and mortality from water-borne disease.¹² By themselves, these facts may not be sufficient evidence for an argument. However, when these facts are combined with the explanation that the link between safe drinking water and water-borne disease is the U.S. embargo on water treatment chemicals, the argument against the U.S. embargo becomes much stronger.

Theories are an important category of evidence because they go beyond “mere” facts to interpretations of the importance and meaning of the facts. Even explanations that are not formal theories frequently are necessary complements to factual evidence.

PRESUMPTIONS

Presumptions are a kind of evidence that falls under the category “evidence related to reality.” Presumptions do not necessarily describe reality but describe how people expect reality to be. Presumptions are a kind of evidence based on what we expect to happen in the ordinary course of events. Presumptions are not facts themselves but may be based on facts.

Examples of presumptions used as evidence in the construction of arguments include assumptions about which events can be expected, about the nature of people in general or specific persons, and so forth. For instance, we presume that next winter the weather in Florida will be warm. This presumption is not an observable fact because today we cannot observe next winter’s weather. However, the weather in Florida has been warm for so many winters that we assume it will