

Simply saying that women participating primarily in the private sphere do not have the most powerful, high paying jobs does not demonstrate a causal relationship. As the affirmative debater, you would need to explain that the philosophical attitude that treats women as a natural part of the private sphere of life (for instance, assumptions that women's main duty is giving birth and raising children, which leaves them less able to engage in the public sphere) leads to the discrimination against women. Arguing that the relationship is causal rather than coincidental is the job of the affirmative team.

METHODS USED TO SUPPORT AND REFUTE CAUSAL REASONING

Constructing an argument about cause and effect is especially difficult because causes often cannot be observed; they can only be inferred. When you argue that one phenomenon causes a second, you usually do so by observing that some change in the first phenomenon is accompanied by a corresponding change in the second. For instance, a gardener piles mulch around her berry plants and then notices that they grow larger and sweeter. The gardener may infer that mulching resulted in better berries. The point is that she observed two phenomena: the mulching and the growth of larger, sweeter berries. From these observations, she inferred that mulching caused the growth. Because causes are inferred but not directly observed, they are difficult to prove and, even in the best of circumstances, cannot be proven completely.

The most common way to support a cause-and-effect argument is to first carefully observe the phenomena suspected to be the cause and the effect, and then to analyze how they are associated. The inferences made about causes and effects based on these associations are never perfect, but they are the best ways available to support cause-and-effect arguments. Associational methods form the basis of John Stuart Mill's five "Canons of Causation."³ Mill's canons form the basis of the three simplified methods presented below. These are the methods of agreement, difference, and correlation.

The method of agreement can be used to support a cause-and-effect argument by showing more than one case where two elements are simultaneously present. Having presented these cases, you can then claim that one element is the cause and the other is the effect. Thus, you might present a series of examples of gardens, each of which displayed two features: first, the berries were regularly mulched, and second, the berries grew large and sweet. Using the method of agreement, you could construct an argument claiming that mulching causes large, sweet berries.

To illustrate using our women's rights example, imagine that a debater presents two examples of societies that maintain a clear separation of the private and public spheres and in which women have substantially fewer rights than men. In this instance, according to the method of agreement, you could argue that one of the elements (the separation of the public and private) is the cause and the other (diminished women's rights) is the effect.

No method of supporting a cause-and-effect argument is perfect, but the method of agreement, especially when used alone, is particularly susceptible to error. Consider a very simple example:⁴