

Sufficient causal arguments are another important dimension of causal argument. To say that “X is a sufficient cause of Y” is to say that the presence of X, regardless of other factors, virtually guarantees the presence of Y. For example, in some countries, people who are disabled or whose incomes fall below a certain level are eligible for financial assistance from the government. In this example, *either* disability *or* low income is a sufficient condition for financial assistance. Neither is a necessary condition. If you are disabled, you can receive financial assistance even if you do not have a low income. Similarly, if you have a low income, you can receive financial assistance even if you are not disabled.

To use another example, the proper combination of fuel, ignition, and compression is a sufficient cause for an internal combustion engine to run. If all three of these elements are present, combustion will occur and the engine will start. Thus, the combination of the three elements is a sufficient cause.⁷

Like arguing about necessary causes, arguing about sufficient causes is an important part of causal argument. Unlike necessary causes, sufficient causes may be much more important to arguments about the relationship between the public and private spheres and women’s rights, for instance. Even though the proposition does not require the affirmative to prove that the separation of public and private spheres totally eliminates women’s rights, it arguably requires it to prove that the separation of the public and private spheres, regardless of anything else that may occur, is sufficient to diminish women’s rights.

Contributory causal arguments recognize that the purported cause may be one of many contributors to the effect. For instance, research has demonstrated that smoking contributes to heart disease. But this research does not demonstrate that smoking is either a necessary or a sufficient cause of heart disease. If smoking were a necessary condition of heart disease, only smokers would have the disease. If smoking were a sufficient condition of heart disease, all smokers would have it. But, in reality, smoking is only one of many factors that contribute to heart disease. However, smoking as a contributory cause does not diminish its real and significant contribution to the occurrence of that disease.

Intervening and counteracting causes are another type of causal argument. An intervening or counteracting cause is one that prevents the completion of a cause-and-effect sequence. So while sex may be a cause of pregnancy, the use of birth control has a counteracting effect. While smoking may lead to heart disease, family predispositions against the disease may keep a particular person from developing it.

In this section we have explained several different methods of supporting causal arguments by associating causes with effects. After our discussion of associational methods, we gave an explanation of different types of causal arguments. In the next section, we provide concrete examples for debaters of where they can use these associational methods to present various types of causal arguments. These examples concern the issue of how public and private spheres are related to the issue of women’s rights.