

The Two Factors in a Convincing Argument: Criticizing Arguments

We listed two requirements for an argument to be convincing:

1. The premises of the argument must be **true**.
2. The conclusion must **follow from** the premises
(in other words: The argument must be **valid**.)

Since an argument needs to satisfy both of these requirements to count as convincing, an argument will be *unconvincing* if fails to satisfy either requirement. So these requirements highlight the different grounds for **criticizing an argument**. An argument can be accused of being unconvincing because

1. one or more *premises are false*,

or because

2. the *conclusion does not follow* from the premises (i.e., the argument is invalid),

or because of

3. *both* false premise(s) *and* an invalid argument.

And recall that the evidence for an argument being invalid will be presenting a **validity counterexample** – a possible way of having the premises true, but the conclusion still false.

In each of the following examples, an argument is accused of being unconvincing. For each case, **decide if the argument is being criticized for (i) having a false premise, (ii) being invalid, or (iii) both.**

1. **Ace:** Look, ordinary objects in the universe can't cause themselves to come into existence: people need parents to exist, chairs need carpenters, new drugs need chemists, dents require collisions, and so on. And every single ordinary thing does require *some* cause – it can't just come into existence out of nowhere. Also, this chain can't just trace back forever. So there had to be some original cause, outside of ordinary things, that started the whole chain of objects to exist – what we call “God”.

Belinda: That's not a good argument. Who say ordinary things can never just come into existence without a cause? For all we know, that might really happen. Also, maybe the chain of things really *does* go back forever.

The argument is being criticized for:

- ☐ having one or more false premises
- ☐ having a validity counterexample (being invalid)
- ☐ both (false premise, and invalid argument)

2. **Ivor:** Rex is a longhaired hippie who hasn't had a job in over a month. Now, we know that whoever broke into the church stole some gold decorations, which would get them several hundred dollars if fenced on the black market – enough money to keep a hippie in Twinkies® and drugs for weeks! Clearly, it was Rex who committed the burglary.

Jack: Just because Rex would stand to benefit from a burglary doesn't mean he actually did it. For instance, Ace could have profited from stealing the gold just as much as Rex. It could be that Ace paid for that fancy new GameBoy® of his by stealing and selling the church stuff, and Rex was an innocent bystander who just happens not to have had a job or haircut recently.

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