

# Logic for Ethicists

PHI 300  
(Erion)

**claim** - a statement, typically expressed with a declarative sentence; the kind of thing that can be true or false

Ex) Lucy is a Labrador retriever.

Ex) It is snowing outside.

**argument** - a set of claims with a conclusion that is supposed to be supported by one or more premises

**premise** - a supporting claim in an argument; often signaled by premise-indicating terms like 'since,' 'because,' 'for,' etc.

**conclusion** - the supported claim in an argument; often signaled by conclusion-indicating terms like 'therefore,' 'so,' 'hence,' 'consequently,' 'accordingly,' 'this implies that,' etc.

Logic teaches us that some arguments are truly better than others, and that the very best arguments (called *sound* arguments) have two characteristics:

(1) their premises are *true*

(2) their premises *support* or *entail* their conclusions (i.e., the conclusions *follow from* the premises; in logical terms, the arguments are *valid* [or at least *strong*]).

**valid argument** - an argument where, *if* the premises are true, the conclusion *must* be true as well; in a valid argument, the premises give the *greatest possible support* to the conclusion, but validity does *not* guarantee the *truth* of a conclusion (compare A and B below)

**sound argument** - an argument that is *both valid and has all true premises*; a sound argument thus *guarantees the truth of its conclusion*, meeting both logical criteria for a good argument

**strong argument** - an argument where, *if* the premises are true, the conclusion is (only) *likely* to be true as well; in a strong argument, the premises provide good, but not absolute, support for the conclusion

A	B	C
1. All Labrador retrievers are dogs. 2. Lucy is a Labrador retriever.	1. All Labrador retrievers are cats. 2. Lucy is a Labrador retriever.	1. <i>Most</i> Labrador retrievers play Frisbee. 2. Lucy is a Labrador retriever.
3. Therefore, Lucy is a dog.	3. Therefore, Lucy is a cat.	3. Therefore, Lucy plays Frisbee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has all true premises, and</li> <li>• premises support the conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has a false premise, but</li> <li>• premises support the conclusion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>may</i> have all true premises, but</li> <li>• premises do not (absolutely) support the conclusion</li> </ul>
valid and sound	valid, but unsound	invalid, and therefore unsound (though strong)