

Argument Reconstructions from the First Detection Exercise

I. Some Good Examples of Reconstructions:

Example #1:

1. There exist things which are not good in the world
2. God either cannot change them, or will not change them
3. If God cannot change them, then he is not omnipotent
4. If God will not change them, then he is not morally perfect
5. Therefore, God cannot be both omnipotent and morally perfect.

Example #2:

1. Suffering is the lack of the greatest amount of happiness
2. There are always things that will make man happier.
3. There is no such thing as the greatest amount of happiness (2)
4. There can exist no world with the greatest amount of happiness (3)
5. God cannot create a world with the greatest amount of happiness (4)
6. God cannot create a world without suffering (1,5)
7. God cannot have the suffering in the actual world attributed to him (6)

Example #3:

1. To not save a child from a burning building when one has the power to makes one not good.
2. God has the power to save any child from a burning building.
3. In many cases, children have died in burning buildings.

4. Therefore, God is not good.

Example #4:

1. A good entity will not leave an infant burning to death if he/she has an ability to help it.
2. God is omnipotent
3. God has an ability to help an infant. [2]
4. God leaves an infant burning to death
5. God is not all good [1,3,4]

II. Exercise: How Can These Reconstructions Be Improved?

Example #1: What is wrong with this premise? “Suffering exists, and God either cannot prevent it or chooses not to. Therefore, God is either not all-powerful or not all good.”

Example #2: How can this argument be “tidied up”? Which premises can be removed?

1. Horrible things sometimes happen to those who are innocent
2. Those who are good and benevolent work to prevent horrible things from happening
3. Those who are capable of preventing horrible things and choose not to do so are evil
4. God is omnipotent
5. God has the power to prevent horrible things from happening (4)
6. Horrible things still happen
7. Therefore, God cannot be entirely good

Example #3: What can be removed from this argument?

1. Innocence allows for unconditional love
2. Children are innocent and grown-ups are not innocent
3. Conclusion: Children can be unconditionally loved

Example #4: Is this argument valid – if not, why not? If yes, why is it on this handout?

1. God is defined as an omnipotent, omniscient and a benevolent being.
2. There is suffering and evil in the world.
3. God, being omnipotent and good, has the power to intervene to prevent something evil or bad from happening, but does not (obvious from the suffering in the world).
4. Therefore, God (if he exists) is morally reprehensible and consequently not all-good.

Example #5: Is this argument valid? If not, why not? If yes, why is it on this handout?

1. It's just one's neighbors that one cannot love
 2. John the Merciful, a saint, helped a frozen beggar who was putrid and loathsome from some awful disease out of 'self-laceration,' from the self-laceration of falsity, for the sake of the charity imposed by duty, as a penance laid on him.
 3. For anyone to love a man, he must be hidden, for as soon as he shows his face, love is gone.
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4. Conclusion: One cannot love one's neighbor

Example #6: How would you tidy up this argument?

1. God is all-powerful.
2. God thus has the power to stop evil from happening but does not.
3. Evil currently occurs in excess and cannot be explained as necessary for the creation of goodness.
4. If we encourage efforts to limit evil, then God should be held to the same standard.
5. The world, the manifestation of God's deeds, is equally as evil as it is good.
6. For god to be good, God cannot be equally as likely to be good as evil.
7. Conclusion: “It is unlikely that God is all good.”

Section Homework #1 – Answer Key

- 1) The premise is too long and contains many claims. Each claim should be its own premise.
- 2) (1) and (6) say almost the same thing, so (1) can be removed. (3) is unnecessary. A tidied up version:
 1. Those who are good and benevolent prevent horrible things from happening when they have the power to do so. (Assumption)
 2. God is omnipotent.(Assumption)
 3. God has the power to prevent horrible things from happening (1).
 4. Horrible things happen (Assumption).
 5. God is not good. (1,3,4)
- 3) The part of premise (2) that says “grown ups are not innocent.”
- 4) This argument is not valid as it is. It requires an extra premise saying that if a good being has the power to prevent horrible things from happening, she would do so.
- 5) This argument is valid but it is not convincing because the conclusion is identical to premise 1.
- 6) Here’s a tidied up version:
 1. God is all powerful. (Assumption)
 2. God has the power to stop evil from happening. (1)
 3. If we encourage efforts to limit evil, God should limit evil if he has the power to do so. (Assumption)
 4. We do encourage efforts to limit evil. (Assumption).
 5. God should limit evil if he has the power to do so. (3,4).
 6. God should limit evil. (2,5)
 7. God does not limit evil. (Assumption).
 8. A good being does what she should do. (Assumption).
 9. God does not do what she should do. (6,7).
 10. God is not good. (8,9)

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