Tutorial A08 Answer Key

A08.3 Exercises

Question 1. Answer the following questions.

1. Does a good argument have to be sound?

Answer: No. A good argument need not have all true premises, so it need not be sound. A good argument need not be valid; invalid arguments are not sound.

2. Can a good argument be inductively weak?

Answer: No. A good argument must be strong or valid, and if an argument is inductively weak, it is neither strong nor valid.

Question 2. These are some arguments (or just premises) that students have given to support the idea that there is nothing morally wrong with eating meat. Discuss and evaluate these arguments carefully. Think about whether the premises are true, and whether they support the conclusion that it is morally acceptable to eat meat.

Answer: Responses will vary. See the sample responses for each argument below.

1. Human beings are part of the food cycle of nature.

Answer: Plants are part of the food cycle of nature, but plants do not eat meat. It is not clear how this is supposed to support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

2. Human beings are able to digest meat.

Answer: Many things we are able to do are also things we ought not do: kill innocent people, lie without good reason, steal without good reason. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

3. It is ok to eat meat because meat is just a kind of food and we need food to survive.

Answer: Being a kind of food is not the same as being a kind of food we need to survive; for example, lettuce is a kind of food, but we do not need to eat lettuce to survive.

4. It is ok to eat meat because lots of people eat meat; because everyone around me eats meat.
Answer: Everyone around you doing something does not mean that everyone is doing something morally permissible; for example, even if everyone around you is killing innocent people, killing innocent people is morally wrong. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

5. It is ok to eat meat because the government does not stop people from eating meat.

Answer: The government does not always make immoral behavior illegal; for example, it is immoral to lie for no good reason, but it is also legal to do so.

6. Many other people eat meat.

Answer: Many others doing something does not mean that they are doing something morally permissible; for example, even if many others kill innocent people, killing innocent people is morally wrong. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

7. Meat contains protein, and we need protein to survive.

Answer: There are other sources of protein, and it is not clear that the protein we receive from meat is not available from non-meat food sources. Thus, this does not support the idea that we need to eat meat to survive.

8. We are animals, and it is ok for animals to eat animals.

Answer: It is not okay for humans to eat other humans, even though humans are animals. At best, this argument supports the claim that it is morally permissible to eat certain kinds of animals, but it does not say which animals these are, and the animals might not be the ones that we typically purchase in grocery stores.

9. It is ok to eat meat, because I started eating meat when I was a child.

Answer: That you have been doing something for a long time does not mean that what you have been doing is morally permissible; for example, if you have been stealing from poor people for a long time (because you are a bored, rich person), it is wrong for you to do so and always has been. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

10. Meat is more tasty than vegetables.

Answer: This is a matter of preference. Moreover, even if it is true, more needs to be said to show that tastiness is an indicator of morality. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

11. It is ok to eat meat, because nobody told me that this is wrong.
Answer: Whether something is right or wrong typically does not depend upon whether you know that it is right or wrong; for example, it is wrong to kill innocent people even if you have never been told that it is wrong. So this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

12. I love eating meat.

Answer: More needs to be said to show that what you love to do is thereby morally permissible to do, especially because sometimes people love to do bad things. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

13. It is ok to eat meat, because set meals in restaurants have very little vegetables.

Answer: There is no moral requirement that you obtain your food in restaurants. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

14. Animals kill each other.

Answer: Not all animals kill each other; even though humans kill other humans, it is wrong to eat other humans. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

15. Maintain the balance of nature - there will be too many animals otherwise.

Answer: Killing excess animals suffices to maintain the balance of nature, so this does not show that it is okay to eat the animals killed. Moreover, it is not clear that human killing of animals is the only way to maintain the balance of nature. Perhaps the balance is maintained without our killing animals. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

16. We are more powerful than animals.

Answer: More needs to be said to show that might makes right. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

17. I was taught that I should eat meat.

Answer: It is possible to be taught that you should do what is wrong. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

18. Human beings are at the top of the food chain.
Answer: Modern biology does not accept the idea of a food chain. In any case, more needs to be said to show that might makes right. Thus, this does not support the claim that it is morally permissible for us to eat meat.

19. Eating meat can help me avoid certain diseases.

Answer: This claim requires further support.

20. We have special teeth for eating meat.

Answer: More needs to be said to show that our having an ability to do something means that acting on that ability is morally permissible.

Question 3. As an example, suppose your friend told you that she is going camping for the whole weekend. She is a trustworthy friend and you have no reason to doubt her. So you accept the following argument as a good argument:

Amie will be camping this weekend. So she will not be able to come to my party.

But suppose the camping trip got cancelled at the last minute, and so Amie came to the party after all. What then should we say about the argument here? Was it a good argument?

Answer: Surely you were justified in believing the premise, and so someone might argue that it is wrong to require that a good argument must have true premises. It is enough if the premises are highly justified (of course the other conditions must be satisfied as well.)

If we take this position, this implies that when we discover that the camping trip has been cancelled, we are no longer justified in believing the premise, and so at that point the argument ceases to be a good argument.

Here we prefer a different way of describing the situation. We want to say that although in the beginning we had good reasons to think that the argument is a good one, later on we discover that it wasn’t a good argument to begin with. In other words, the argument doesn’t change from being a good argument to a bad argument. It is just that we change our mind about whether the argument is a good one in light of new information. We think there are reasons for preferring this way of describing the situation, and it is quite a natural way of speaking.

So there are actually two ways to use the term good argument. We have adopted one usage here and it is fine if you want to use it differently. We think the ordinary meaning of the term is not precise enough to dictate a particular usage. What is important is to know very clearly how you are using it and what the consequences are as a result.