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A DEDUCTIVE ARGUMENT WITH A SPECIFIC PREMISE AND A GENERAL CONCLUSION

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Though no contemporary logicians hold that every valid deductive argument has a conclusion not more general than its premises, it has recently been claimed that every counter example to this claim is contrived [1]. I wish to propose a noncontrived counter example. Consider the following three sentences.

(1) John is mortal.
(2) John is not mortal.
(3) All men are mortal.

(1) and (2) *seem* less general than (3) since they are about one man while (3) is about all men. The word 'seem' is used because I am really unclear about what distinguishes a less from a more general sentence. For example, I do not know whether

(4) John is not mortal or all men are mortal.

is "specific" like (1) and (2) or "general" like (3). Whichever it may be, however, a valid deductive argument may be constructed which has a conclusion more general than any of the premises from which it is derived.

Suppose that (4) *is not more general than either* (1) *or* (2).

Since they are less general than (3), (4) is also less general than (3). The following argument has, then, a conclusion more general than any of its premises.

(A) (1) John is mortal.
(4) John is not mortal or all men are mortal.
$\therefore$(3) All men are mortal.

Suppose that (4) *is more general than either* (1) *or* (2).

On this, the alternative assumption, (A) may no longer be a counter example to the questionable claim about deduction, but the following argument is.

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(B) (2) John is not mortal.
∴(4) John is not mortal or all men are mortal.

On either supposition, we have a noncontrived counter example. The counter example could be avoided by declaring that (4) is general in argument (A) and specific in argument (B). However, unless there is proposed a criteria for distinguishing the general from the specific without relying upon the arguments of occurrence, this move is question begging.

REFERENCE

[1] Kahane, H., *Logic and Philosophy*, 2nd ed., Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont, California (1973), p. 250.

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