

AN EMPATHIC THEORY OF CIRCULARITY

Many sensible people think that an argument must have premises. Not me. My rebuttal:

MT: _____

Therefore, there are arguments without premises.

Although MT lacks a premise, MT does have a premise set: the empty set. Hence, MT has all the parts listed in the standard definition of 'argument' i. e. it does consist of an ordered pair whose first member is a set of propositions (the premises) and whose second member is a proposition (the conclusion). Furthermore, MT is semantically valid: it is impossible for all the premises to be true while the conclusion is false. There is no need to use inference rules to establish the conclusion because the logician's definition of 'argument' makes the conclusion analytically true. An argument is sound if (a) it is valid and (b) all of its premises are true. MT satisfies condition (a) by the analyticity of its conclusion and satisfies

condition (b) vacuously by lacking premises. Hence, MT is sound.

Moreover, MT does not beg the question. Against whom would MT beg the question? Anyone who doubts the conclusion of MT should deny that it is a question-begging argument. Those who persist in believing that MT is circular must desist from portraying circularity as a relation (identity, presupposition, etc) between a conclusion and its premises.

I abide by ordinary usage and use 'circular' and 'question-begging' interchangeably. Some philosophers reserve 'circular' for arguments that have the syntactic property of restating the conclusion as a premise. For instance, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (1999) contends that the following argument manages to be circular without begging the question: 'Some deductive arguments do not reason from general to particular, therefore, some deductive arguments do not reason from general to particular'. He might further suggest that MT is the converse case of a non-circular argument that begs the question.

The distinction between circularity and question-begging is especially artificial in the case of arguments that beg the question by virtue of their inference rules. Any argument that begs the question by virtue of using a contested inference rule has a counterpart that begs the question by using a propositional analogue of that inference rule. For instance, instead of begging the question against the intuitionist by using

the inference rule of double negation, I can use the premise $\sim \sim P \rightarrow P$.

I reiterate that MT does not use an inference rule. The conclusion of MT sits on its own bottom as an analytic truth. The absence of any substantive derivation prevents MT from serving as an explanation of why the conclusion is true. Often, substantive derivations double as explanations of why the conclusion is true. When I go through a proof that $\{v, \sim\}$ is a truth-functionally complete set of connectives, I thereby understand why $\{v, \sim\}$ is truth-functionally complete. However, this explanatory service is not a necessary condition for argumenthood.

1. Defining 'argument'

Premiseless arguments should be classified as arguments for the excellent reasons logicians cite: The empty premise set helps us distinguish proofs from derivations, it helps us define the concept of logical truth (logical truth = a conclusion that can be derived without premises), and lets us crisply contrast inference rules that require assumptions (modus tollens) with those that require no assumptions (reductio ad absurdum). In short, our best theory of argument is best served by this well-entrenched definition. We have ample reason to accept the theory because it has been rigorously matured into meta-theory. Indeed, many of us must now go to the math library to get our copies of Geoffrey Hunter's Metalogic

and Elliott Mendelson's Introduction to Mathematical Logic. If you want to say that MT only qualifies as an argument under a "technical" definition of 'argument', then be prepared to say that the empty set only qualifies as a set under a technical definition of 'set'.

Although MT is rendered valid by the logician's definition of 'argument', MT is not an argument that itself appeals to definitions. After all, it is premiseless. I also abstained from any inference rules when propounding MT. Thus the argument cannot involve the inference rule circularity that harries attempts to justify induction with induction or deduction with deduction. MT is not like an argument that uses the principle of excluded middle to infer 'Either penguins fly or not' from the empty set. It is akin to an argument composed of the empty set and 'Some conjunctions have only one conjunct'. The conclusion is an analytic truth that conflicts with a stereotype.

An argument is syntactically valid when its validity turns on just its logical words. 'Logical word' is a vague term of art. There are clear cases such as 'and', 'all', and 'not' and some borderline cases such as 'earlier'. But 'argument' and 'premise' are not counted as logical words in this sense. They are logical only in that they are theoretical terms of meta-theory. Hence, the conclusion of MT can be rigorously (though trivially)

proved within meta-theory. Nevertheless, 'There are arguments without premises' is a truth about logic, not a truth of logic.

Most people think that arguments must have premises and would (mistakenly) regard my propounding of MT as a question-begging rebuttal. I agree that the following meta-argument about MT begs the question against this audience:

Meta-MT: MT is an example of an argument that has an empty premise set.

Therefore, some arguments have no premises.

Although I agree with Meta-MT, I do not propound it. Unlike MT, Meta-MT has a premise that is not acceptable to its intended audience.

MT's audience includes historically prominent logicians and philosophers. Immanuel Kant pictured argument as the extraction of information contained in the premises. Meta-MT begs the question against Kant. However, Kant is in no position to object that MT begs the question against him. For then he would be inconsistently objecting that MT is a question-begging argument that is not an argument. Friends of Kant might complain, on Kant's behalf, that MT begs the question against Kant. But that would be incompetently paternalistic. For this "defense"

of Kant entails that the conclusion of MT is right and Kant is wrong. Kant has a more attractive response to MT. In particular, he could justly accuse me of presupposing a conception of argument that he was sure to challenge.

I plead guilty. But that still leaves me innocent of begging the question. For MT can beg the question against Kant only if Kant is in a position to complain that MT begs the question against them (Sorensen 1996). If Kant knows what's good for him, he won't do that.

Neither will Augustus DeMorgan. He thought that an argument must derive a conclusion by combining information. (This position dates back to the Stoics.) Hence, DeMorgan believed that an argument must have at least two premises. Consequently, we can foresee that Meta-MT has a premise unacceptable to DeMorgan. Yet Meta-MT does not beg the question against DeMorgan. For Meta-MT can beg the question against DeMorgan only if DeMorgan is in position to complain that Meta-MT is a question-begging argument. He clearly is not in such a position given his combinatory theory of argument. DeMorgan is committed to denying that any "immediate inference" begs the question. Instead of complaining that Meta-MT begs the question, DeMorgan would simply deny that Meta-MT is an argument.

DeMorgan's combinatory theory of argument would also lead him to deny that MT is a question-begging argument. MT is even more clearly non-circular to DeMorgan because MT does not even have a premise to which DeMorgan could take exception.

Still others require that the conclusion reshape information in the premises. They would deny that MT is an argument because there is no information in the premise set of MT. Only with the rise of set theory in the twentieth century, do logicians weaken the requirement to that of being an ordered pair of a set of propositions and a proposition.

2. Circularity ain't in the head

Robert Hoffman (1971) characterizes question-begging as a speech act confusion: instead of arguing, the speaker is merely asserting the conclusion. Hoffman believes that there is a fallacy of begging the question but denies that any argument begs the question; indeed, he thinks all question-begging "arguments" are pseudo-arguments.

There certainly are pseudo-arguments:

B1: A gazillion is more than a zillion.

A zillion is more than a jillion.

Therefore, a gazillion is more than a jillion.

Since the argument is using nonsense numerals, B1 does not express any proposition and so is a pseudo-argument. It only looks like an instance of the argument form $x > y, y > z, \text{ therefore, } x > z$. Indeed, B1 fails to instantiate any argument form. No set of meaningless sentences instantiates any argument form. Since $\neg P, \text{ therefore, } P$ is an argument form, the following is actually a pseudo-circularity:

B2: A zillion is more than a jillion.

Therefore, a zillion is more than a jillion.

When combined with the doctrine of linguistic division of labor, B2 shows that circularity ain't in the head. Most people rely on authority when they use the big numerals that follow 'million': trillion, quadrillion, quintillion, sextillion, octillion, nonillion, decillion. Hence, many propound arguments that are phenomenologically equivalent to neatly structured nonsense.

Anyhow, that's how things are in the Big family. On Monday, Mr. Big advanced the following argument against Mrs. Big:

B3: An octillion is more than a quintillion.

Therefore, an octillion is more than a quintillion.

Neither party can specify the number referred to by 'octillion' and 'quintillion'. But both manage to refer to the correct numbers just as the botanically ignorant Hilary Putnam (1986) manages to pick out elm trees with his use of 'elm tree' even though he cannot personally distinguish elm trees from beech trees.

On Tuesday, Mr. Big advances B2 against Mrs. Big. Both parties think that their debate is of the same sort as Monday's. They fail to realize that 'zillion' and 'jillion' are nonsense numerals. Despite appearances, Mr. Big fails to propound a circular argument and does not beg the question against Mrs. Big.

So far, Mr and Mrs Big have shown us that internal states do not suffice for circularity. Just looking at the "circular" inferential patterns of Mr. Big does not show that he is involved in any circularity. We can continue the story to show the converse point: an argument can be circular even though there is no inner circle.

On Wednesday, Mr. Big learns that 'zillion' and 'jillion' are nonsense numerals. He overcompensates by falsely inferring that

`nonillion' and `decillion' are also nonsense numerals. Indeed, he propounds B4 as a practical joke against Mrs. Big:

B4: A decillion is more than a nonillion.

Therefore, a decillion is more than a nonillion.

Mr. Big thinks B4 is as nonsensical as B2. Hence, Mr. Big thinks that he has not propounded an argument. But the joke is on him. Mrs. Big demonstrates that he has indeed propounded a circular argument by showing Mr. Big the dictionary entries for `decillion' and `nonillion'.

Unlike Putnam, Mr. Big did not intend to defer to an authority. However, Mr. Big's willingness to accept correction shows that he had a conditional intention to defer to authority. Although he believed that `decillion' and `nonillion' were nonsense numerals, he had the intention that if the words were part of English, then the words mean whatever the experts say they mean. After all, the best explanation of why Mr. Big used `decillion' and `nonillion' is that he had once encountered the words, forgot about their origin, and then misconstrued them as his own inventions. Thus Mr. Big was unwittingly participating in a linguistic practice just as he might unwittingly participate in an auction. Arguing is like bidding. You can do it without intending to and even despite an

intention not to. Just as people overestimate their ability to randomize, they overestimate their ability to generate nonsense.

Belief about whether one is arguing is fallible. Compare the inadvertent arguer, Mr. Big, with a verificationist who denies that moral argument is possible. The verificationist conceives of his pro-euthanasia arguments as akin to chanting. For our verificationist thinks that moral utterances merely express deep emotions. Later, he abandons verificationism. Our lapsed verificationist comes to believe that his earlier utterances were indeed arguments. Formalist mathematicians provide another illustration. Formalists believe that they are manipulating meaningless strings of symbols -- like beads on an abacus. They motivate this game by its illuminating analogy with meaningful discourse: a "theorem" in the game correlates with a genuine theorem elsewhere. Formalists are opposed by mathematical realists. Realists say that the formalists are propounding genuine arguments in their "games". A formalist who converts to realism will regard some of his past exercises as unwitting proofs.

There is no need for nonsense. For the externalist theme about circularity can also be illustrated with indexicals. An eccentric logician, Professor A. Priori, amuses himself by propounding fallacious arguments

while blindfolded. He takes himself to have argued in a circle when he reasons:

(H) Here it is hot.

Therefore, here it is hot.

However, unscrupulous teaching assistants are silently wheeling the logician about in his armchair. Hence, Professor A. Priori's first use of 'here' picks out a different place than his second. To know whether the argument is circular, one must know facts outside of the speaker's head.

If psychology is restricted to narrow content, then logicians should not fear (or hope!) that psychologists will gobble up the theory of fallacies. If the ethics of belief is restricted to what we can reliably control, then some fallacious reasoning does not warrant reproach. Some circularity is not a matter of inwardly reasoning in a circle -- or a matter of doing anything that is intrinsically illogical. Some circularity is due to bad luck.

Theories of question-begging must reconcile with externalism about mental content. Contrary to the Cartesian picture of reasoning, the question-beggar is not always involved in a mental slip that he could have reasonably avoided.

3. Pseudo-pseudo-arguments and the principle of charity

When I propound MT, I create a situation reminiscent of the "Argument Clinic" skit from Monty Python's Previous Record:

A: An argument isn't just contradiction.

B: Can be.

A: No it can't. An argument is a connected series of statements intended to establish a proposition.

B: No, it isn't.

A: Yes it is.

Party A is denying that B is arguing. This commits A to denying that B has advanced a question-begging argument against him.

The Monty Python phenomenon can also be illustrated with my personal refutation of solipsism:

- S:
1. You exist.
 2. I exist.
 3. You and I are distinct.
 4. Therefore, solipsism is false.

I have modeled this proof of other minds on G. E. Moore's (1959) proof of an external world:

- M:
1. Here is one hand.
 2. Here is another hand.
 3. Therefore, there are objects in the external world.

Both of these show and tell exercises exploit the audience's tendency to spontaneously believe in what is directly exhibited before them. My argument has two advantages over Moore's. First, there are no superfluous premises. What's that extra hand doing in M? Second, S does not beg the question against the solipsist. If the solipsist complains that I begged the question against him, then he will have conceded that he and I exist. But if S begs the question against anyone, it begs against the solipsist. Since a question-begging argument must beg against someone, it follows that S does not beg the question.

Although I stand by my claim that MT and S are sound arguments that do not beg the question, I was only teasing when propounding them. The solipsist will not accept the second premise of S on my sayso. The solipsist might admit that it looks like I exist but he would dismiss this as

an illusion. Yes, he does spontaneously believe in people -- especially those who present themselves before him and start arguments. But he repudiates this tendency at a theoretical level just as he repudiates his tendency to believe in ghosts during midnight strolls through graveyards. The solipsist finds it natural to talk as if I exist. But his rebuttal is officially intended to be without an audience. So the solipsist is not engaged in the self-defeating enterprise of accusing me of begging the question against him.

Whereas B2 is a pseudo-argument, S is a pseudo-pseudo-argument. Like MT, it gives the illusion of being a pseudo-argument when viewed from a certain perspective.

Standard theories of question-begging have a problem with pseudo-pseudo-arguments: they violate the principle of charity by attributing a defense that defeats the defender. In particular, they imply I begged the question against the solipsist even though the solipsist himself denies that I begged the question and even though solipsism would be false if I did manage to beg the question against the solipsist.

The danger of destructive intervention also arises when pseudo-pseudo-arguers are afoot. Suppose Hilary Putnam asserts that I am a brain in a vat. I counter:

MTV: 1. I believe that I am not a brain in a vat.

2. Therefore, I am not a brain in a vat.

Putnam cannot accuse me of begging the question. His theory of reference emphatically rules out the possibility of disembodied brains having beliefs about external objects. That means, I, qua brain in a vat, cannot beg the question against embodied, full professors from Harvard (Putnam 1981, chapter 1).

4. The externalist perspective

I first argued that circularity "ain't in the head". Then I argued that rational persuasion strongly perspectival. This apparent conflict can be resolved with an externalist account of logical verstehen.

Unlike a Leibnizian monad, my perspective is shaped by external circumstances. Moreover, I do not have the degree of privileged access generally assumed by internalist accounts of mental content. The nature of my thoughts is affected by my environment and social setting. In one sense, I can perfectly simulate the thought processes of my twin earth doppelganger. However, my thoughts do not have the same (wide) content. When I think about 'water', I think about H₂O. My doppelganger thinks about XYZ. My simulations of him are

psychologically successful if we limit ourselves to narrow content. But the failure to preserve wide content imposes an evaluative limit on the method of empathy. Rationality, like fitness, is relative to an environment. Reasoning that is well-adapted to Earth may be equivocal, circular, or even inconsistent on Twin Earth. If the mathematical community had given currency to `zillion', `jillion', and `gazillion', then someone who propounded an argument token that was homonymous with B1 would have argued soundly. Likewise, the homonymous counterpart of B2 would have been circular instead of meaningless.

My perspective is not equivalent to my narrow psychology. It is my psychology as situated in historical circumstances. Hence an assessment of question-begging may involve more than an empathic identification. One must consider the victim of question-begging as an historical agent, related to many things of which he is unaware. This seems to build a wall around each agent. How can an historian simulate Antoine Lavoisier's reasoning given that the historian does not share Lavoisier's milieu?

Through content inheritance (Burge 1993). Given an appropriate causal rapport, empathizers inherit the external relations of those they simulate. Consider a British astronomer who is refereeing an article by an American astronomer. In the American dialect, the numerals after a million increase at thousand-fold increments: a billion is a thousand

millions, a trillion is a thousand billions, etc. In the British dialect, the numerals after a million go up at million-fold increment: a billion is a million millions, a trillion is a million billions, etc. Thus 'A billion divided by a million is a million' is true in the British dialect and false in the American dialect. More subtly, when an American says 'A trillion is more than a billion' he utters a different analytic truth than when an Englishman utters "the same words". Of course, the Englishman can choose to abide by the American dialect. And indeed, the British astronomer will do this when he tries to replicate an error in the American's reasoning. To detect a miscalculation, the Englishman will step into the American's shoes and defer to American linguistic authority.

If a British speaker is unaware of the dialect difference, he is apt to misinterpret the results of his own simulation. The principle can be seen with anaphoric chains connecting speakers. Suppose the Englishman is at a New York restaurant and his American companion says "Please give me some chicory" to the waiter. The Englishman adds 'I'll also have chicory'. The Englishman is then disappointed when served a leafy vegetable that the British do not call 'chicory'. Although the Englishman is surprised, he got what he ordered. His use of 'chicory' piggy-backed on his companion's American usage.

The Englishman is entitled to believe that usage is uniform. So he need not justify meta-linguistic propositions about what the American said. The same defeasible assumption operates for simulating other perspectives.

The assumption fails in a dramatic way when I am simulating an agent who is causally isolated from me. Consider another possible world which is qualitatively identical to this one (or if you object to qualitatively identical but distinct worlds, let there be an insignificant qualitative concerning some remote pebble). Assume neither Bill Clinton nor I exist in this duplicate world. Of course, we have exact duplicates in the duplicate worlds. As far as narrow psychology is concerned, I can perfectly simulate my duplicate. Indeed, I know that he is now simulating my thoughts. (Possible worlds are causally isolated from each other but causal isomorphism can obtain without a causal connection.) However, he cannot share the wide content of my thought that Bill Clinton is chubby. For my duplicate only has causal contact with the Bill Clinton's duplicate. Since we do not have access to the same propositions, I can propound circular arguments that my duplicate cannot even conceive. Of course, in one sense I know just "what it is like" to propound circular arguments using Bill Clinton's duplicate's name. For my qualia are exactly the same as my duplicate's.

There are infinitely many circular arguments that I cannot propound. Nevertheless, externalist verstehen permits me to match the thinking of those I normally aim to simulate. For they do share the causal connections that let me piggy-back on their wide content.

5. Another category of argument failure

I propounded MT, S, and MTV to provoke you into drawing a distinction. The reaction I seek is this: Yes, this prankster has propounded non-circular, sound arguments against Kant, the solipsist, and Putnam. But no, these arguments are not rationally persuasive. MT and company share an empathic shortcoming with question-begging arguments. Yet they do not actually beg the question.

To see why, consider the role of perspective shift in argument. I, the arguer, need to infer in a way that is rationally persuasive to you, my audience. To do this I must predict the performance of the least understood organ; the brain. It is impractical to solve this problem in a purely top-down manner (by applying psychological generalizations). Therefore, I make some use of the bottom-up method of simulation. In particular, I start with the default assumption that you and I have the same cognitive state (beliefs, desires, inference rules, qualia, the whole thing).

Notice that I can reach this point of departure without knowing which cognitive state I am in. A man who tries on gloves that he is considering as a gift for his identical twin need not know his own hand measurements or the measurements of his brother. He is solving the problem by manipulating a model (himself!) rather than by calculating. His hands carry information that can have cognitive effects without passing through an intermediate representation. The method of empathy lets me exploit the information in my head without requiring that the information to be in the content of my beliefs. This information could be as intellectually inert as the information contained in my hands. Indeed, much of the information is probably in a format that cannot be learned by me or a neurocryptographer (Dennett 1978). Verstehen ensures that information has effects that are learnable without that information being itself accessible. Recall Yeats' line: "Man can embody the truth, but he cannot know it."

Sometimes the information can be totally inaccessible to the brain that contains it. British virologists were astounded to discover a survivor of the Spanish flu in a nursing home. He had contracted the virus as a boy and it had inflicted permanent, profound brain damage. Nevertheless, the virologists believe the man's brain contains valuable

information in the form of the virus' remnants. They eagerly await the opportunity to dissect his brain and extract that information.

But other forms of unrepresented information in the brain probably are accessible by indirect means. The method of empathy can be understood this way. After I make the assumption that you share my cognitive state, I make the minimum adjustments needed to account for my evidence of our differences. This means that I will systematically overestimate your similarity to my cognitive state. My efforts to persuade you will be systematically egocentric: arguments that would be persuasive to anyone who fits my model of your cognitive state are apt to fail because you differ too much from that model. My verstehen has undershot. My next attempt is also more likely to undershoot than overshoot. For it is not economical for me to pursue the hypothesis that you are distant from me. The more distant you are, the less likely that I can hit a position near you. (The mathematics of artillery fire warns that the number of my adversary's possible positions grows geometrically with distance: to find the adversary, arc outward modestly from a short estimate.)

Question-begging is a side-effect of the most efficient way of persuading one another. So it is an ineliminable tendency in human thought, and indeed any thought by thinkers operating under a

constraint of scarce resources i.e. all physically possible thinkers. Given 'ought' implies 'can', the general tendency to circularity is an innocent feature of the human condition.

The generality of the tendency can be underscored with an epistemological discovery by the artificial intelligence community -- the "frame problem". How should a computer update its representations of the world? It is wasteful to start from scratch. The computer cannot examine each possible side-effect because these possibilities grow at an exponential rate. To avoid a combinatorial explosion, there must be a selective search for side-effects of the change.

The top-down strategy is to develop a theory of how things tend to change. This theory might embody principles such as 'No action at a distance', 'Effects are proportional to causes', and so forth. These principles embody substantive knowledge of the world.

A simpler strategy is model manipulation -- as when architects manipulate light sources to learn how a new building will cast shadows. Instead of trying to directly predict the actual changes, manipulate analogous, more accessible situations in analogous ways. The external situation will be like its causally isomorphic model.

The simplest strategy of all is "persistence forecasting" in which there is a presumption that everything has remained the same. The

presumption of uniformity can only be overridden by positive evidence for a change. This is a surprisingly powerful strategy. Only recently have meteorologists surpassed the verisimilitude of the following rule for short-term weather: Tomorrow will be the same as today.

A computer that argued would probably apply all three strategies -- just as ordinary people do. The simplicity scale of these strategies invites a developmental conjecture. Children should rely first on persistence forecasting, then graduate to model manipulation, and then lastly apply a theory of how the world operates. Children do appear to rely more heavily on the persistence strategy than adults. This is documented in the psychological literature on the false belief test (Harris 1989). The persistence strategy presupposes a stock of natural kind terms to give substance to the prediction that things will remain the same. As dramatized by Nelson Goodman's (1954) example of 'grue' and Jerry Fodor's (1987) 'fridgeon', the persistence strategy generates different predictions relative to different predicates. Indeed, there is evidence that children apply innate theories of physics and psychology.

When the strategy of model manipulation is applied to psychological matters, the method of empathy emerges as a special case. I can simulate your mental processes by "going off line" and then hypothetically assuming your beliefs and desires as inputs into my own

system. The output will be reliable to extent that we are structurally similar. If we are structurally different, then my predictions will be biased in favor of similarity to myself. In addition to this structural bias, there will be a doctrinal bias in favor of my beliefs. To keep my simulation manageable, I must make only a small number of hypothetical changes. Hence, I will, in effect, assume you pretty much believe what I believe. This reinforces the doctrinal egocentrism that accrues from persistence forecasting.

We correct the excesses of the egocentric strategies by learning more about the audience's cognitive state. (Actually, it is sometimes best to argue first and ask questions later: one quick way to explore another's cognitive state is to see which arguments he finds question-begging.) Third parties can help by vicariously defending one's adversary. This logical verstehen requires a charge of question-begging to be lodged from the perspective of the victim rather than sub specie aeternitatis.

A critic may respond: "We should have an open mind but not so open that our brains fall out! Some perspectives are crazy and it is crazy to test for question-begging by adopting a crazy perspective." I agree that actually occupying some crazy perspectives weakens one's judgment. That is why psychologists who study inebriation keep most perspective shifts hypothetical. They do get some insight from occasionally being

drunk themselves. Experiments provide more raw relevant data than simulations. So there is a trade-off. I also concede that we often should not care about begging the question. Many positions are not interesting enough to merit argument. But abstaining from inquiry about whether an argument is question-begging is different from rejecting an important principle: if one wishes to judge whether an argument begs the question, then one must evaluate the argument from the perspective of the victim. It is this principle that gets MT off the hook, not its freedom from a defective relationship between premise and conclusion.

MT does share a key feature with paradigm cases of question-begging arguments: the propounder of MT is in a position to foresee that his audience ought not to be persuaded by it. After all, the propounder of MT should foresee that his audience cannot concede that MT is an argument. Consider a logical skeptic who does not believe that there are arguments. I cannot rationally persuade him by arguing that there are arguments (though I might rationally persuade him by other means). But if I do argue that there are arguments, there is no danger my argument will be question-begging. For my target cannot consistently construe my effort as a question-begging argument.

Question-begging is not a mere privation of rational persuasion. It is an achievement of a dubious sort -- like theft. I cannot steal from

someone who fails to own anything. Likewise, I cannot beg the question against someone who does not deny me premises or inference rules.

Consider the dual of the skeptic, the trivialist (Priest 1997). The trivialist agrees with everything. No one can beg the question against this character. When presented with any argument, the trivialist agrees with the premises and acquiesces to all the inference rules. True, the trivialist also agrees with the negations of the premises. But that merely shows he is inconsistent. Inconsistency about p does not guarantee the circularity of any argument that uses p as a premise.

I am not claiming any triumph over the trivialist or the logical skeptic or the solipsist. My point in propounding MT was to present a new kind of counterexample to:

R: All non-circular, sound arguments are rationally persuasive.

When I argue with you, I try to advance an argument that is rationally persuasive from your perspective. The arguments fail because they cannot be perceived as good arguments by their intended audience. To this extent, 'rationally persuasive argument' is response-dependent. A rationally persuasive argument must be such that it can be perceived as such by those it is directed at. Thus part of the arguer's task is to step

into his adversary's shoes and appraise the argument from his opposed viewpoint. Question-begging is an empathic shortcoming. But not all empathic shortcomings in argumentation are question-begging.

Your perspective constrains the inferential resources that I may use. I beg the question when I go beyond this allotment. Typically, I violate the constraint you impose because I undercompensated for our differences. Normally I adjust modestly downwards from the presumption that we have the same inferential resources. For instance, force of habit may lead me to justify the reliability of my memory by my memory of my memory's accuracy. Or I may try to prove that there are other minds by appealing to the many experts who believe that there are other minds. The successful arguer must inhibit many natural reactions; he must abstain from attractive paths of reasoning and decline to use well known propositions as premises. The arguer needs to act out the role of his adversary in much the same way as an actor takes on a character. Part of this is a matter of knowing who you are simulating. But there is also the task of restraining knowledge. The empathic model of question-begging puts novel emphasis on this latter, less cognitive aspect of successful argumentation. Simulation is more like experimentation than theorizing. The empathic arguer achieves the (albeit limited) freedom from theoretical commitment associated with experiment. Just as an

experiment offers an opportunity to break out of theoretical preconceptions, empathy lets me break out of the circle of my own opinions.

The empathic model of argument also suggests that there is a fallacy opposite to question-begging. Often my adversary has inferential resources that I lack. That means I can rationally persuade him by appealing to premises that I do not believe and inferential rules I do not accept. The argument will be rationally persuasive from his perspective, not mine. After all, the relevant resource base is his, not mine. Instead of always adjusting down from my perspective, I should sometimes adjust up.

Admittedly, these upward adjustments have a lawyerly air of insincerity. The propounder cannot regard these arguments as knowledge producing because he does not believe all of their premises or he refuses to accept the inference rule. Such arguments are constructed for export only, not internal consumption. Despite this alienation from his labor, the lawyerly arguer can rationally persuade. He is free to preface such arguments with an announcement that he does not accept the argument. Admittedly, such a disclaimer diminishes the persuasiveness the argument. For the audience tends to lean on the arguer's authority; his belief in the premises and his judgment of validity

tends to be viewed as evidence. Nevertheless, the argument can stand on its own. James Boswell once discounted an argument on the grounds that a lawyer had propounded it for money. Samuel Johnson replied that money can just as easily buy a sound argument as a fallacious one.

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