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Begging the Question

petitio principii

(also known as: assuming the initial point, assuming the answer, chicken and the egg argument, circulus in probando, circular reasoning [form of], vicious circle)

Description: Any form of argument where the conclusion is assumed in one of the premises. Many people use the phrase “begging the question” incorrectly when they use it to mean, “prompts one to ask the question”. That is NOT the correct usage. *Begging the question* is a form of circular reasoning.

Logical Form:

*Claim X assumes X is true.
Therefore, claim X is true.*

Example #1:

Paranormal activity is real because I have experienced what can only be described as paranormal activity.

Explanation: The claim, “paranormal activity is real” is supported by the premise, “I have experienced what can only be described as paranormal activity.” The premise presupposes, or assumes, that the claim, “paranormal activity is real” is already true.

Example #2:

The reason everyone wants the new "Slap Me Silly Elmo" doll is because this is the hottest toy of the season!

- Argument from Silence
- Argument of the Beard
- Argument to Moderation
- Argument to the Purse
- Avoiding the Issue
- Base Rate Fallacy
- Begging the Question
- Biased Sample Fallacy
- Blind Authority Fallacy
- Broken Window Fallacy
- Bulverism
- Causal Reductionism
- Cherry Picking
- Circular Definition
- Circular Reasoning
- The Fallacies: Co-Ex <
- The Fallacies: Fa-Hy <
- The Fallacies: Id-Mu <
- The Fallacies: Na-Ri <
- The Fallacies: Sc-Wi <

Explanation: Everyone wanting the toy is the same thing as it being "hot," so the reason given is no reason at all—it is simply rewording the claim and trying to pass it off as support for the claim.

Exception: Some assumptions that are universally accepted could pass as not being fallacious.

People like to eat because we are biologically influenced to eat.

References:

Walton, D. N., & Fallacy, A. A. P. (1991). *Begging the Question*.



Registered User Comments



Krista Neckles

Monday, March 18, 2019 - 08:36:45 PM

Hello Sir,

I know that there is a fallacy in this passage, but can you tell me which kind please: "Recent studies have shown that conventional food has the same vitamins, minerals, proteins, and other nutrients as organic food. Therefore, it's just as good to eat conventional food as organic food".

Thank you in advance.

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2 replies

0 votes

Tuesday, March 19, 2019 - 07:23:25 AM



Bo Bennett,
PhD

I would say *hasty conclusion* because there is not enough information from this statement* to reasonably draw this conclusion. For example, it is possible that one of the two foods have different ratios of nutrients, etc. or it is possible that one of the two foods contains other ingredients not mentioned that affect health either negatively or positively.

** I am specifically addressing the fallaciousness of this statement and not the claim that conventional food is just as good to eat as conventional food. This is a complicated question where science has a lot to offer and is beyond the scope of this site.*

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0 votes



Krista
Neckles

Tuesday, March 19, 2019 - 12:50:14 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD: Thank you Sir. I was wondering if the example was also an example of a weak analogy or begging the question fallacy.

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Bauta

Tuesday, February 12, 2019 - 01:41:56 PM

Here is the full argument for reference from Stefan Molyneux's Universally Preferable Behaviour [UPB]...

1. Reality is objective and consistent
2. "Logic," is the set of objective and consistent rules derived from the consistency of reality.
3. Those theories that conform to logic are called "Valid,"
4. Those theories that are confirmed by empirical testing are called "accurate,"
5. Those theories that are both valid and accurate are called "true,"
6. "Preferences," are required for life thought, language and debating.
7. Debating requires that both parties hold "truth," to be both objective and universally preferable.
8. Thus the very act of debating contains an acceptance of universally preferable behaviour (UPB)
9. Theories regarding UPB must pass the tests of logical consistency and empirical verification.
10. The subset of UPB that examines enforceable behaviour is called "morality,"
11. As a subset of UPB, no moral theory can be considered true if it is illogical or unsupported by empirical verification.
12. Moral theories that are supported by logic and evidence are true. All other moral theories are false. Here is the full argument for reference from Stefan Molyneux's Universally Preferable Behaviour [UPB]...

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11. As a subset of UPB, no moral theory can be considered true if it is illogical or unsupported by empirical verification.
12. Moral theories that are supported by logic and evidence are true. All other moral theories are false.

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2 replies

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Bo Bennett,
PhD

Tuesday, February 12, 2019 - 01:48:33 PM

No. It appears to just be two premises with no conclusion.

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0 votes



Bauta

Tuesday, February 12, 2019 - 02:15:53 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD:

I tried to reply, but then accidentally double pasted a copying from a book I'm reading. So, please forgive me for the nuisance and mess above. I'm presently reading Universally Preferable Behaviour by Stefan Molyneux in attempts of going through every moral philosophy I can think of (or find) to learn from them and to avoid errors in my own works as I think morality is an important topic. This is the core argument for his theory found in Appendix A of his book;

1. Reality is objective and consistent
2. "Logic," is the set of objective and consistent rules derived from the consistency of reality.
3. Those theories that conform to logic are called "Valid,"
4. Those theories that are confirmed by empirical testing are called "accurate,"
5. Those theories that are both valid and accurate are called "true,"
6. "Preferences," are required for life thought, language and debating.
7. Debating requires that both parties hold "truth," to be both objective and universally preferable.
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10. The subset of UPB that examines enforceable behaviour is called "morality,"
11. As a subset of UPB, no moral theory can be considered true if it is illogical or unsupported by empirical verification.

12. Moral theories that are supported by logic and evidence are true. All other moral theories are false.

The statements don't seem to make much sense to me in proving his model (which is hardly even defined in the book) and premise eight holds a tu quoque fallacy [conflating being hypocritical with being contradictory], which doesn't necessarily mean the entire table is wrong but also doesn't prove it to be correct. So I've been going through fallacies to try to figure out what may be wrong for further understanding.

Thank you for the quick response, it is greatly appreciated!

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Stefan

Monday, September 17, 2018 - 04:40:43 PM

Hi, I'm currently in an online discussion with a Christian. This is his argument: "Everything in the cosmos tactions on the LOI and LNC. both impact everything. Only God has the ontic capacity to account for LOI/LNC." Is this begging the question?

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4 replies

0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Monday, September 17, 2018 - 05:09:37 PM

I don't know what "tactions", "LOI and LNC", or "ontic capacity" mean.

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0 votes



Stefan

Monday, September 17, 2018 - 06:04:47 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD: That makes two of us. Anyway, could you please answer my question whether his argument is begging the question as he assumed that "God" exists and is the only explanation for whatever he talked about?

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0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Monday, September 17, 2018 - 06:22:32 PM

@Stefan: Yes, because God must exist to be the only one who can... whatever. Now if he rephrased this to say that "a being that has the characteristics of God is the best explanation" then that would be much better, because we are now working with the hypothetical and not making any claims to God's existence or that he is the ONLY one who can do whatever.

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1 votes



Stefan

Wednesday, September 19, 2018 - 05:47:31 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD:

Thank you. Btw, I found out what LOI and LNC mean. LOI is the law of identity and LNC is the law of non-contradiction.

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Anthony

Tuesday, August 21, 2018 - 10:37:56 AM

The first example could also be categorized as 'an argument from ignorance'. Correct?

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1 reply

0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Tuesday, August 21, 2018 - 02:28:40 PM

Perhaps more so if worded as

"Paranormal activity is real because I have no idea how what I experienced could be natural."

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Bill Shaw

Wednesday, March 08, 2017 - 02:47:59 PM

Boy this stuff is tricky! Why isn't the paranormal example like this:

I've experienced paranormal activity.

What I experience is real. (unstated assumption)

Therefore PA is real.

You can question the experience and require a precise definition of PA but is it circular?

Also, why isn't the elmo example not a simple tautology:

Everyone wants slap me silly elmo because everyone wants it.

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3 replies

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Bo Bennett,
PhD

Thursday, March 09, 2017 - 06:48:01 AM

Begging the question /

circular reasoning / tautology - all share similar characteristics. Your example works, as well.

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David
Salzillo Jr.

Wednesday, July 11, 2018 - 10:53:16 PM

@Bo Bennett, PhD:

But what about the first part of Bill's comment?

"I've experienced paranormal activity

What I experience is real (unstated assumption)

Therefore PA is real."

To me at least, the argument really rests on that unstated assumption. It doesn't really seem to beg the question at all. Can you explain that?

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0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Thursday, July 12, 2018 - 01:29:42 AM

@David Salzillo Jr.: Claim X assumes X is true. -> to say that one has experienced PA, is to assume PA is true, otherwise, they would say "I experienced something really strange."

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NJH

Sunday, December 10, 2017 - 08:31:48 PM

#1 Paranormal activity is going to be true if there is evidence and valid argument supporting the claim. There could be other explanations for strange experiences, explanations which have been passed over too quickly to get to the the conclusion: its PA activity.

#2 is a vacuous tautological statement which only tells us nothing new: "it is desirable because it is desired".

People like to eat (which seems a true statement) for a number of reasons including the one that they like to stay alive hence the "biologically influenced to eat". Is this an example of the Broken Compass fallacy? The premise can point to a number of possible directions including the one stated.

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1 reply

0 votes



Bo Bennett,
PhD

Monday, December 11, 2017 - 06:32:25 AM

Never heard of the Broken Compass fallacy, but your question gets to the heart of causality. There are often countless "reasons" for something, and different levels of reasons. If I said that I am hungry, and when asked why, I responded "Because I haven't eaten in 12 hours," then this is not fallacious, although I can also be hungry due to a much more scientific and complex biological answer. If I claimed that was the ONLY reason I was hungry, then this is simply not true.

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