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On question-begging and analytic content

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Abstract Among contemporary philosophers, there is widespread (but not universal) consensus that begging the question is a grave argumentative flaw. However, there is presently no satisfactory analysis of what this flaw consists of. Here, I defend a notion of question-begging in terms of analyticity. In particular, I argue that an argument begs the question just in case its conclusion is an analytic part of the conjunction of its premises.

1 Introduction

Few philosophical accusations are both as common and as damning as the charge that an argument begs the question. Such arguments are taken to be paradigmatic cases of circular, sophistical reasoning. Minimally, philosophers who level this charge demand that their interlocutor retract her argument; often, they urge their opponent to abandon her conclusion entirely. Given the severity of (and philosophers' propensity to raise) this criticism, it is invaluable to understand what, precisely, question-begging consists of.

Perhaps surprisingly, a rigorous analysis has proven elusive. Of course, various locutions express similar ideas. Some might claim, 'Question-begging arguments involve circular reasoning' or 'Their premises contain (or presuppose the truth of) their conclusions.' However, the relevant notions of circularity, containment, and presupposition

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demand just as much clarification as question-begging does, so these statements seem closer in spirit to helpful paraphrases than they do to philosophical analyses.

My central contention is that an argument begs the question just in case its conclusion is a part of the analytic content of the conjunction of its premises. Often, arguments beg the question purely in virtue of their logical form; always, whether or not they beg the question is ultimately determined by their analytic content. As it turns out, philosophers already possess a logic of analytic containment (Angell 1977, 1989, 2002). This provides a helpful resource in debates over whether or not an argument is question-begging.

Other initially plausible proposals quickly founder. It cannot be that an argument begs the question if and only if its conclusion is identical to one of its premises; for, in that case, the flaw of question-begging could be overcome simply by conjoining the relevant premise with an arbitrary truth. Nor, it seems, does question-begging consist in logical entailment, such that an argument begs the question just in case its premises entail its conclusion. If all valid arguments beg the question, it is unclear how they could be illicit. After all, logical validity is an argumentative virtue, not a vice.

Historically, some philosophers did, in fact, maintain that all valid arguments beg the question (Empiricus 1990; Mill 1843). The reintroduction of the topic to analytic philosophy was largely due to Robinson, who understood question-begging similarly (1971). Robinson maintains that begging the question is innocuous, on the grounds that arguments can have only two sorts of flaws: either containing a false premise or an invalid inference. Because question-begging is neither of these flaws, he claims, arguments that beg the question are faultless (or, more accurately, are not flawed in virtue of begging the question).

Unsurprisingly, few were persuaded. While some maintain that begging the question is permissible in restricted cases (e.g., Sorensen 1996; Lippert-Rasmussen 2001), no one licenses it as universally as Robinson does.[1] Nevertheless, those who continue to find fault owe answers to the following questions:

 (i) Given that question-begging cannot be analyzed in terms of logical validity, what does it consist of?
 (ii) What, precisely, goes wrong with arguments that beg the question?

Currently available answers fall broadly into one of two categories: dialectic accounts, which take begging the question to consist of violating rules governing certain types of conversations (e.g., Hamblin 1970; Walton and Woods 1978, 1982; Mackenzie 1979) and epistemic accounts—which take question-begging to consist of violating particular epistemic norms (e.g., Biro 1977, 1984; Sanford 1972, 1981; Jacquette

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[1] Sorensen (roughly) argues along the following lines. Consider the argument: question-begging is an argumentative flaw, therefore question-begging is an argumentative flaw. This is an argument whose conclusion is identical to its premise—a paradigmatic case of question-begging. Suppose this argument were put before Robinson. He, at least, cannot object to the argument on the grounds that it begs the question; after all, he maintains that question-begging arguments are innocuous. Because Robinson cannot consistently object to this argument, Sorensen argues, the argument is epistemically faultless against him. Sorensen's and Lippert-Rasmussen's examples are not widely accepted and have been criticized in the literature. See Teng (1997) for one potential reply.

[1993]).[2] Both have their roots in Aristotle, whose discussion of question-begging in the *Topics* primarily concerns elenchus—or rules of a dialectical game—and whose discussion of question-begging in the *Prior Analytics* primarily concerns a model of scientific inquiry ([1982]).

Those who defend dialectic approaches often argue that the charge of question-begging presupposes a dialogue (e.g., Barker [1976]; Walton [1994]). Some suspect that attempts to reduce question-begging to epistemology (the primary alternative) run the risk of psychologism—of reducing a logical feature of an argument to psychological facts about agents. If, for example, an argument were to beg the question just in case all those who accept the truth of its premises already accept the truth of its conclusion, which arguments beg the question would turn on facts about human psychology.[3] But, surely, the flaw of question-begging is not determined by contingent psychological facts about what propositions people happen to accept.

If the charge of question-begging presupposes the existence of a dialogue, it is reasonable to expect features of the dialogue to determine whether or not an argument begs the question. Many dialectic approaches are formal.[4] Participants in a dialogue have sets of commitments. Their utterances can either add or remove sentences from either their or their interlocutor's set of commitments. Formal rules dictate which sorts of assertions are permissible at any time. These rules are often constructed in such a way so as to prohibit circular argumentation. If, for example, one were to ask, 'Why *S*?' (shorthand for, 'Why ought I believe that *S*?'), it is typically impermissible to respond by asserting, '*S*'.

Dialectic accounts have inherent limitations. It is not immediately obvious how to translate formal dialectic games into arguments that philosophers actually make, which often contain many more types of locutions than the formalisms capture. Moreover, although these accounts forbid types of circular argumentation, they do not explain what it is that makes these arguments circular. After all, there are many ways to break the rules of a formal game that do not, in any intuitive sense, seem circular.[5] But perhaps the largest concern is that someone can attempt to uncover the truth of a statement and—independently of conversations with others—come to believe it (or to disbelieve it) on the basis of question-begging arguments. Sometimes, this reasoning can be reasonably interpreted as an internal dialogue: someone considers a hypothetical conversation and forms beliefs on the basis of the conversation's results. Rules governing conversations may apply to this sort of case. Other times, it cannot be reasonably interpreted as a dialogue. Agents are capable of forming beliefs on the basis of viciously circular inferences without considering potential conversations.

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[2] Walton disputes the distinction between these approaches in "Begging the Question as a Pragmatic Fallacy" ([1994]). Similarly, Jackson's account falls fairly neatly between the two approaches ([1987]).

[3] It is worth noting that not all epistemic accounts are as transparently psychologistic as this example might suggest.

[4] I suspect that this is due to the fact that Hamblin, who introduced this approach to the literature, did so in the context of formal representations of logical fallacies ([1970]).

[5] Understanding many of these violations would require covering the formal systems in more detail than I have the space to here. However, one example from Walton and Woods ([1978]) is that a participant usually violates the dialectic rules if she makes multiple claims before her interlocutor responds. This may be rude, but need not be circular.

Epistemic accounts appear well-equipped to explain what goes wrong with question-begging arguments. Because begging the question is defined in terms of violating an epistemic norm, the problem with question-begging arguments is, presumably, reducible to the norm that the arguments violate. Biro, for example, claims, "The innocuous circularity of (all) arguments becomes vicious only when such arguments are used to lead us from a supposedly known truth to a supposedly unknown one, where the former is no more knowable than the latter ... a proposition which forms a part of an argument is more knowable than other propositions in that argument if it is knowable independently of knowing the others" (1977, pp. 264–265).[6] So, according to Biro, question-begging arguments are those that ostensibly lead reasoners from known premises to unknown conclusions, when it is in fact impossible to know that the premises are true without already knowing that the conclusion is true. And what goes wrong with question-begging arguments is the fact that they fail to generate the knowledge that they ostensibly advance.

Challenges remain. One potential worry is that epistemic accounts cannot accommodate cases in which an argument begs the question but violates no epistemic norm—however rare these cases may be. Lippert-Rasmussen argues that question-begging arguments are unobjectionable if the addressee of such an argument has independent reasons to accept the conclusion, the addressee fails to employ those reasons, and the reasons that the addressee rejects the conclusion are poor (2001). Suppose, for example, that I believe that Smith is not in the dining hall and that Smith is not in the library and conclude, on the basis of these beliefs, that Smith is neither in the dining hall nor in the library. And suppose that someone were to tell me, 'Smith is either in the dining hall or the library. He is not in the library; therefore he is in the dining hall.' Intuitively, this use of disjunctive syllogism begs the question. However, Lippert-Rasmussen contends that the argument is permissible if my reasons for disbelieving that Smith is in the dining hall are poor, and I have strong reasons (that I have overlooked) to accept that Smith is either in the library or the dining hall.[7] If Lippert-Rasmussen is correct, accounts of question-begging in terms of violating an epistemic norm misdiagnose cases in which an agent begs the question but violates no epistemic norm.

More importantly, purely epistemic accounts do not explain why the internal structure of some arguments is viciously circular, while the internal structure of others

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[6] See Sanford (1981) for a reply. One potential worry is that, on this characterization it is possible for two propositions to each be 'more knowable' than the other, since each may be known independently of one another.

[7] Many find Lippert-Rasmussen's argument unpersuasive. For example, Ritola argues that he ignores a crucial distinction (2006). In the case above, I *am justified in believing* that Smith is in the dining hall or the library due to the fact that the situation I am in warrants that belief. The evidence that I possess—yet unfortunately ignore—supports the belief that Smith is in the dining hall or the library. Nevertheless, I do not *justifiably believe* that Smith is in the dining hall or the library, because I base my belief on a question-begging argument rather than on legitimate evidence. Ritola claims that, in arguing that question-begging is occasionally permissible, Lipptert-Rasmussen conflates situational justification (being justified in believing something) and doxastic justification (justifiably believing something). If Ritola is correct, then there are no cases in which an argument begs the question and is epistemically permissible, so the worry that epistemic accounts of question-begging cannot accommodate those cases in which question-begging is permissible does not arise.

is not. After all, we can sometimes determine that an argument begs the question from its logical form alone. Every argument whose conclusion is identical to one of its premises begs the question—as does every argument whose conclusion is identical to a conjunctive part of a premise or is the double negation of a premise. Each of these structures may be fleshed out in different ways, but they remain circular in virtue of having the logical form that they have. We can enquire into what it is about these structures themselves that are circular—without directly considering how agents epistemically interact with them. Although there may be norms that govern making circular inferences, the norms themselves are implausible analyses of circularity.

None of this is meant to be a knock-down assault on other accounts. To some extent, they may even be compatible with my own. If, for example, analyticity is defined in epistemic terms (like the proposal that a sentence ϕ is analytic just in case all those who understand what ϕ means believe that ϕ), an analysis of question-begging in terms of analyticity is compatible with an analysis of question-begging in terms of epistemology.[8] My modest goal is to make space for an account of question-begging directly in terms of argumentative content.

An adequate account of question-begging ought, minimally, to answer the questions posed above (namely: What does question-begging consist of, if not logical validity? What goes wrong for arguments that beg the question?), to correctly diagnose intuitive cases, and to offer an account of the circularity contained within question-begging arguments. An account in terms of analytic content succeeds in all of these respects. Or so I shall argue.

2 The unity of question-begging

It might appear that philosophers use 'beg the question' as an imprecise blanket term to describe many sorts of arguments that they object to. Is there unity? Of course, ordinary speakers typically use 'beg the question' quite differently than philosophers do. Many mean something like 'raise and fail to answer an important question.' And some philosophers may use the phrase to criticize an argument that is sufficiently obvious or trivial. I do not address either of these here, nor do I dispute that they are legitimate uses of the term. I mean only to address the use of 'beg the question' that directly concerns circular argumentation.

This restriction does not itself guarantee that there is a single, unified phenomenon. Perhaps circular arguments come in many guises. I suspect, however, that there is some unity. A paradigmatic case of a question-begging argument is one whose conclusion is identical to one of its premises. Such an argument remains question-begging—in precisely the same use of the term—if the problematic premise is replaced by its double negation or if it is conjoined with an arbitrary truth. It is plausible, then, that there is some unified phenomenon of question-begging that applies to numerous arguments and various logical structures.

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[8] For my part, I find epistemic analyses of analyticity implausible. Those who defend such views, minimally, owe a reply to Williamson (2007) . However, I do not take a stand on this issue here. My point is only that if analyticity is defined in epistemic terms, then an analytic account of begging the question is compatible with an epistemic account of begging the question; the two may both be correct.

Nevertheless, I doubt that all philosophers criticizing circular arguments use the term 'beg the question' in perfect alignment with any analysis. Given how frequently it is employed without an analysis in mind, it would be surprising if we have happened upon something precise. Furthermore, some disagree about whether particular arguments beg the question.[9] Accounts take a stand on these cases, accepting some positions and eliminating others, and so are—at best—in imperfect alignment with previous discussions. My aim is neither to describe these prior debates nor to ignore them entirely, but to rigorously isolate an aspect significant to philosophical practice. This goal is more closely related to Carnapian explication than it is to linguistic analysis. 'Beg the question' can be made more precise than it has been made so far, and this precision is valuable because it allows for meticulous application.

3 Some brief remarks on analyticity

Before describing the role analytic content plays in begging the question, it is important to clarify the relevant notion of analyticity. There are various ways this clarity could be achieved. Probably the most straightforward way would be to explicitly define analyticity in more fundamental terms. This is not the approach that I take. Instead, I offer some remarks intended to isolate the notion relevant to question-begging, and follow these with a discussion of a formal logic of analytic containment. None of what I say here is entirely new, and all of it is at least somewhat controversial. I ask the patience of those familiar with this topic, as well as those skeptical of the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths. Although I count myself among those who maintain that analyticity is coherent, and will assume so throughout the bulk of this paper, I outline how this assumption can be dropped in some concluding remarks.

A sentence is often, and somewhat inaccurately, said to be analytic just in case its truth-value is determined purely by the meanings of its terms. Paradigmatic examples include 'Bachelors are unmarried' and 'Vixens are foxes.' More precisely, a sentence is analytic just in case its truth-value is determined both by the meaning and ordering of its terms. The sentence 'If b is between a and c, then b is between c and a' may well be an analytic truth, but its truth-value is not determined by its terms' meanings alone. 'If b is between a and c, then a is between b and c' is false yet contains identical terms with identical meanings. So ordering is an essential component of analyticity.

One might, based on these characterizations, take analyticity to consist in a relation between the meanings (and orderings) of terms and the truth-values of sentences. Such a conception remains impoverished, as terms contribute far more to the meanings of sentences than their truth-values. The sentence 'Julius Caesar was the emperor of Rome' has the same truth-value as 'Two is an even number,' but the sentences express different propositions. An adequate account of analyticity ought, minimally, to explain how the meanings of sentences depend on the meanings and orderings of the terms contained within them.

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[9] I discuss one such argument—Moore's proof of the existence of an external world—below.

Discussions of analyticity rooted in the containment of meaning are as old as the notion of analyticity itself (Kant 1781).[10] However, the first sophisticated discussion of the way in which the meanings of sentences depend on the meanings of their terms occurs in Frege (1884). Frege maintained that sentences denote their truth-value. Like other denoting terms, they have a *sense*—or way in which they denote. Frege held that senses are compositional, so the way in which sentences denote their truth-value depends on the way in which their constituent terms denote. So the meanings of sentences depend on the meanings of their parts. Although it is fairly implausible that sentences denote their truth-values, many endorse some sort of compositionality principle such that the meanings of sentences depend on the meanings of their parts.

Some sentences contain—as proper parts—expressions that are themselves truth-evaluable. The sentence 'The sky is blue and grass is green' contains 'The sky is blue,' and 'If it is raining, then the street is wet' contains 'It is raining.' In such cases, the meanings of the compound sentences depend, at least partially, on the meanings of their truth-evaluable components. It is this type of analytic containment—the containment of the meaning of one assertoric sentence within the meaning of another—that is of primary interest here.

In some (but not all) cases, a sentence's logical form guarantees that its meaning contains the meaning of another. p is an analytic part of both $p \wedge q$ and $p \wedge r$—and q is a part of $\neg\neg q$ and $\neg\neg\neg\neg q$. This suggests the promise of a formal propositional logic of analytic containment—one that governs cases in which the meaning of one sentence contains the meaning of another. Such a system cannot plausibly be classical; q is entailed by $p \wedge \neg p$, but the meaning of q is irrelevant to the meaning of the conjunction.

The project of formalizing such a system was undertaken by Angell (1977, 1989, 2002). Recently, Correia and Fine have independently provided semantics for Angell's syntax (2004, 2015), and Fine has employed Angell's system while developing a deontic logic (among other things) (forthcoming).

Let a language L contain denumerably infinite sentence symbols s_1, s_2, ... as well as the operators $\neg$ and $\wedge$ ($\vee$ is defined in the standard way). Additionally, let L contain the binary operator $\rightarrow$, which is intended to be interpreted as analytic containment such that '$s_1 \rightarrow s_2$' asserts that s_2 is an analytic part of s_1. The axioms and rules of inference of L are the following:

1. $A \rightarrow \neg\neg A$
2. $\neg\neg A \rightarrow A$
3. $A \rightarrow A \wedge A$
4. $A \wedge B \rightarrow A$
5. $A \vee B \rightarrow B \vee A$
6. $A \vee (B \vee C) \rightarrow (A \vee B) \vee C$
7. $(A \vee B) \vee C \rightarrow A \vee (B \vee C)$

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[10] Although Kant introduces the notion of analyticity in terms of predicative and conceptual containment, he later endorses a coarse-grained notion of analyticity such that A is contained within the concept B just in case a contradiction can be derived from $A \wedge \neg B$. This has the implausible result that every tautology is an analytic part of all predicates. As MacFarlane notes, this oversight may be largely due to the meager logical resources available in Kant's time (2002).

8. $A \lor (B \land C) \rightarrow (A \lor B) \land (A \lor C)$
9. $(A \lor B) \land (A \lor C) \rightarrow A \lor (B \land C)$
10. $A \rightarrow B, B \rightarrow A/\neg A \rightarrow \neg B$
11. $A \rightarrow B/A \lor C \rightarrow B \lor C$
12. $A \rightarrow B, B \rightarrow C/A \rightarrow C$

In this paper, I assume that Angell's logic is adequate and that it elucidates the notion of containment at issue. Several theorems bear on its current application. First, $\emptyset \vdash A \rightarrow A$ is a theorem, so $\rightarrow$ is more reasonably interpreted as analytic parthood, rather than analytic proper parthood. Second, $\emptyset \vdash (A \land \neg A) \rightarrow B$ is not a theorem on this system, so there are classical entailments that do not follow in L.[11] Thirdly (and the significance of this will become apparent shortly), $A \rightarrow B \vdash A \land C \rightarrow B$ and $A \rightarrow B \vdash \neg \neg A \rightarrow B$ are both theorems (which are interpreted to mean 'if B is an analytic part of A, then B is an analytic part of $A \land C$' and 'if B is an analytic part of A, then B is an analytic part of $\neg \neg A$,' respectively).

The scope of this logic is somewhat limited. Many hold that 'John is an unmarried male' is an analytic part of 'John is a bachelor.' Because Angell's system is incapable of expressing predicates, it does not express that sort of containment. Nevertheless, it remains a valuable tool. Using it, one can accurately infer that one sentence is an analytic part of another. Angellic containment can thus be seen as a sufficient—but not a necessary—condition for analytic containment. Furthermore, extending this system is straightforward. The following captures some cases of analytic containment involving predicates:

> **Predicative Containment** For all predicates F and G, if $\ulcorner$to be F is to be $G\urcorner$ is an analytic truth, then $\forall x(\ulcorner Gx \urcorner$ is an analytic part of $\ulcorner Fx \urcorner).$[12]

Because 'To be a bachelor is to be an unmarried male' is an analytic truth, it follows that 'John is an unmarried male' is an analytic part of 'John is a bachelor.' Much more could be said about analyticity, but I hope that the discussion above makes the relevant notion sufficiently clear.

4 Question-begging as analytic containment

I contend that an argument begs the question if and only if its conclusion is an analytic part of the conjunction of its premises. This proposal, I believe, has a great deal going for it. But before addressing some of its more abstract advantages, let us examine how it diagnoses particular cases.

4.1 Case 1: Proof that the Bible is the word of God

Max: The Bible is the literal word of God. We can be assured of this because the Bible claims to be the literal word of God. Everything which the Bible claims

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[11] Additionally, $\emptyset \vdash A \rightarrow (A \lor B)$ is not a theorem, so L also differs from standard relevance logic as well.

[12] Note that I am quantifying over names of objects.

is true, because it is the word of God. Therefore, the Bible is the literal word of God.

Substantive disagreements aside, this is a transparently poor reason to believe that the Bible is the word of God. Importantly, this argument begs the question. Max, it seems, has reasoned in the following way:

1. The Bible is the literal word of God.
2. If something is the literal word of God, then what it claims is true.
3. The Bible claims to be the literal word of God.
4. Therefore, the Bible is the literal word of God.

His conclusion—that the Bible is the literal word of God—is identical to premise 1. This is an easy case, but it is important (perhaps especially important) for accounts to accommodate the easy cases.

Intuitively, the meaning of a conjunction contains the meaning of its conjuncts. So, because Max's conclusion is identical to one of his premises, the conclusion of his argument is, intuitively, a part of the analytic content of the conjunction of its premises. But we need not rely on intuition here. Because $\emptyset \vdash A \rightarrow A$ is a theorem on Angell's system, 4 is a part of the content of 1. And, because $A \rightarrow B \vdash A \wedge C \rightarrow B$ is a theorem, 4 is a part of the conjunction of 1–3. It falls out of Angell's logic that Max's conclusion is a part of the meaning of the conjunction of his premises. On this account, this means that his argument begs the question.

4.2 Case 2: Double negation

It is widely held that if an argument begs the question, replacing the problematic premise with its double negation results in an argument that also begs the question. Suppose that Max, for example, were to retreat from premise 1 and replace it with "It is not the case that it is not the case that the Bible is the literal word of God." This can hardly be seen as an improvement. As Walton says, "For any conclusion A, one can always give a (question- begging) argument of the form, 'not-not A, therefore A'. Challenged to defend the premise, one could give another argument of the same form, 'Not-not-not-not A, therefore not-not A'. This tedious process could be continued indefinitely, and it strikes us as question-begging." (1994, p. 98).

This is only slightly trickier than Case 1.[13] Given the present logic, $\emptyset \vdash \neg\neg A \rightarrow A$ is a theorem. So Max's replacement is a part of the analytic content of premise 1. Because it is a part of the content of premise 1, it is a part of the content of the conjunction of the argument's premises. On this account, this argument still begs the question.

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[13] Although easier, this is not to say that every account of question-begging gets this case correct. Hoffman, for example, claims that an argument begs the question just in case the proposition expressed by the conclusion is identical to a proposition expressed by a premise (1971). Sanford objects, partially on the grounds that someone could replace a premise with its double negation. Although this premise arguably expresses a different proposition, surely this does not avoid the charge of begging the question (1972).

4.3 Case 3: The incompatibility of free will and determinism

It is implausible that all valid arguments beg the question. An adequate account ought to not only correctly diagnose those arguments that do beg the question but also to correctly diagnose those arguments that do not. As a purely formal matter, there are valid inferences such that the conclusion is not an analytic part of the premises. As mentioned above, $\emptyset \vdash (A \land \neg A) \rightarrow B$ is not a theorem. An argument of the form $p \land \neg p$, therefore q, is a valid argument in which the conclusion is not an analytic part of its premises.[14] Therefore, there are valid arguments that do not beg the question.

Let us consider an example. Van Inwagen has argued that free will and determinism are incompatible on the basis of an example concerning a judge who sentences a man to die (1974). By 'determinism' he means the thesis that the conjunction of the laws of physics with a proposition expressing the state of the world at any one time entails a proposition expressing the state of the world at any other time. He argues that, if determinism is true then the state of the world before the judge was born and the laws of physics entail that the judge will sentence the man to die. Because the judge has control over neither the state of the world before his birth nor the laws of physics, he does not have control over whether or not he will sentence the man to die.

Following van Inwagen, let J be the judge, let P_o be some proposition that expresses the state of the world before the judge's birth, let P be the proposition that the judge sentences the man to die, and let L be a proposition expressing the conjunction of the laws of physics. A shortened version of van Inwagen's argument goes as follows:

1. If determinism is true, then the conjunction of P_o and L entails P.
2. J cannot render P_o false.
3. J cannot render L false.
4. If J cannot render P_o false and cannot render L false, then J cannot render the conjunction of P_o and L false.
5. If J cannot render the conjunction of P_o and L false, then J cannot render any proposition entailed by the conjunction of P_o and L false.
6. Therefore, if determinism is true, then J cannot render P false.

Van Inwagen spends a great deal of time defending premises 1–5. Our present concern is not with their truth-value. Rather, it is with their analytic content. Does the meaning of the conjunction of 1–5 contain the meaning of 6? If so, van Inwagen's argument begs the question. If not, it does not.

The meaning of 6 is a conditional—which strictly surpasses the expressive power of Angell's logic. Nevertheless, I believe that we can reasonably say that the conjunction of the premises does not contain the conclusion.[15]

6 is not plausibly a part of the meaning of 1. Crucially, 6 describes J's abilities—his power to render a proposition false. No part of 1 refers to J's abilities—it merely describes which propositions entail one another. Because there is an aspect of the

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[14] Such arguments are not restricted to inferences from contradictions. Similarly, an inference from p to $p \lor q$ does not beg the question on this account.

[15] Recall that Angell's logic supplies only a sufficient condition. So this elaboration is plausible.

meaning of 6 (*J*'s abilities) that is not an aspect of the meaning of 1, 6 is not a part of the meaning of 1.

Nor is it plausible that the meaning of 6 is a part of the meaning of 2 or 3. Although they describe *J*'s abilities, they make no mention whatsoever of *P*—the proposition that *J* will sentence the man to die. Because this proposition is a part of 6 and not a part of 2 or 3, the meaning of 6 is not a part of the meaning of 2 or 3.

4 and 5 make no mention of determinism, and so it is implausible that the meaning of 6, which makes a claim concerning determinism, is a part of the meaning of either 4 or 5.

So the meaning of 6 is not a part of the meaning of 1–5. Is it a part of the meaning of their conjunction? I see no reason to believe that it is. 6 follows from the substantive interaction between premises 1–5. While aspects of the meaning of 6 relate to aspects of the meaning of various premises, there is no reason to believe that what 6 means is, in any way, a part of what the conjunction of 1–5 means. Van Inwagen's argument may or may not be sound, but, on this account, it does not beg the question.

4.4 Case 4: Moore's proof of an external world

Some cases are difficult to diagnose. Philosophers disagree about whether or not arguments beg the question. One such argument is Moore's proof of the external world. Although Moore intended his proof to refute idealism, contemporary philosophers often interpret it as an attempt to refute skepticism. Here, I follow them. Moore's argument can be expressed as follows:

1. Here is a hand.
2. If there is a hand, then there is an external world.
3. Therefore, there is an external world.

Most philosophers believe that this argument is unsuccessful. Some argue that it begs the question against the skeptic, while others locate its failure elsewhere. How does my account rule on this case?

It depends. There are two ways in which Moore might be considered to beg the question. However, there is room for reasonable disagreement. This room, I believe, explains why some take the argument to be question-begging while others do not.

Firstly, some may disagree about the meaning of 'hand.' If part of what 'hand' means is 'an object extended in space,' Moore's argument is question-begging because the meaning of the conclusion is contained within the meaning of the first premise.[16]

Secondly, there may be more to Moore's argument than initially appears. Davies has argued that the problem with Moore's argument concerns a transfer of warrant (2000). Although I am warranted in believing that there is a hand, and I am warranted in believing that if there is a hand, then there is an external world, I am not warranted in concluding that there is an external world. The reason the transfer of warrant fails, he argues, is that the claim that an external world exists is a part of the justification of my

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[16] It may be that 'hand' mediately contains the meaning of 'extended object.' Perhaps the meaning of 'hand' contains the meaning of a term defined in terms of spatial extension. Given that the containment of meaning is transitive, this would be a case in which 'hand' contains the meaning of 'spatial extension.'

belief that there is a hand. As an explanation of Moore's failure to refute skepticism, this is probably incorrect. As Beebee notes, skeptics do not believe that we are warranted in believing that hands exist, so Moore's skeptical opponents cannot appeal to Davies's response (2002). Nevertheless, Davies raises an important point. Moore may present 1 and 2 as premises—as starting points for an argument. However, there may be an implicit argument in which 1 and 2 are intermediate steps. That is to say, Moore may accept 1 and 2 on the basis of unstated premises. If there are implicit premises, the conclusion may be analytically contained within them. If so, the implicit argument is question-begging; if not, it is not.

If the meaning of 'hand' does not contain the meaning of 'external world' and there are no question-begging implicit premises, my account maintains that Moore does not beg the question. Of course, this does not mean that his argument is successful. But its failure, if there is one, is located elsewhere. This result may seem unsatisfying. After all, the account I defend is intended to allow for precise application. How can it fail to definitively determine whether or not Moore begs the question? Although it does not issue a verdict by itself, it remains valuable. Ultimately, the status of Moore's argument turns on considerations of meaning. By recognizing this, we can better appreciate how to progress—focusing our attention on the meanings of the relevant terms and the way in which they hang together.

4.5 Other virtues

I believe that this account correctly diagnoses relevant cases. It has other virtues. It explains the way in which question-begging arguments are both circular and have premises that contain their conclusion. These are arguments that proceed from premises to a conclusion whose meaning is a part of the meaning of those premises. Of course, there may also be premises with analytic parts unrelated to the conclusion. The circularity, however, arises in the aspect of the conclusion's meaning that is a part of the meaning of the premises. Relatedly, the claim that, in these arguments, the premises contain the conclusion is to be taken almost literally. The relevant containment is the containment of meaning. So in recognizing what the premises of an argument means, one thereby recognizes what the conclusion means as well.

This account also has the resources to explain what goes epistemically wrong with arguments that beg the question. There may be several epistemic applications, but one concerns the closure principle.

At its simplest, the closure principle states that if S knows that p, and p entails q, then S knows that q. As stated, the closure principle is obviously false. After all, S may have no idea that p entails q—and may even disbelieve that q. How could it be that knowledge of one proposition demands knowledge of every proposition that it entails?

Although simple closure is implausible, many believe that something in the neighborhood is correct. A much more plausible principle is that, if S knows that p, and q is an analytic part of p, then S knows that q. Because p is an analytic part of $p \wedge q$, knowledge of $p \wedge q$ entails knowledge of p. There is no way to know that a conjunction is true without knowing that its conjuncts are true—those who do not know that p is

true lack the resources to know that both p and another proposition are true (without first coming to know that p is true).

This restricted version of the closure principle (which we might call closure under analytic parthood) has implications for the current account of question-begging. Question-begging arguments are those whose conclusions are analytic parts of the conjunction of their premises. Assuming that knowledge is closed under analytic parthood, it is impossible to know that the conjunction of the premises is true without knowing that its analytic parts are true. Because the conclusion is one of these parts, it is impossible to know that the conjunction of the premises is true without knowing that the conclusion is true. So, all those who know that the premises of question-begging arguments are true already know that the conclusion is true. Such arguments cannot employ knowledge of premises to yield knowledge of their conclusions.

5 Conclusion

All of this might seem available only to those select few who, like myself, hold analyticity in high regard. Following Quine's influential contribution, many came to suspect that the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is incoherent (1951). In light of the central role that analyticity plays in this proposal, it might appear that many cannot avail themselves of my account.

This is premature. Quine allows for a notion of analyticity restricted to logical form. The system he had in mind was classical first-order logic, rather than Angellic logic, but he had nothing against accounts of analyticity given in purely logical terms. Quineans could accept the sort of analytic containment outlined by Angell but reject principles like Predicative Containment, which concerns the meanings of predicates.[17]

This may appear insufficient. After all, Angellic containment applies to relatively few arguments. There are many more that beg the question. However, the positive conception of meaning that Quine outlines affords additional resources. Quine is a semantic holist. He does not deny that meaning exists entirely but claims that the meaning of a term depends on the use of all other terms in a complex web of language. Some terms are more closely related than others are. 'Bachelor' occurs more often in contexts in which 'marital status' arises than in ones in which 'locomotive' arises. Still, the meaning of any term depends, to some extent, on the meaning of any other. Quine can reasonably be interpreted not as denying that analyticity exists, but as maintaining that it comes in degrees. The sentence 'Bachelors are unmarried men' contain terms whose meanings are more closely related than the sentence 'There are twelve bachelors in this room' does. A sentence is 'more analytic' than another just in case the meanings of the terms in the former are more closely related than they are in the latter. In this vein, Quineans could hold that all arguments beg the question—to some degree. All are arguments in which the meaning of the premises, to some extent, depend on the meaning of the conclusion. However, the more closely related the

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[17] Quineans might accept that Predicative Containment is vacuously true. Because there are no predicates F and G such that ⌜to be F is to be G⌝ is an analytic truth, all predicates F and G are such that if ⌜to be F is to be G⌝ is an analytic truth, then $\forall x$(⌜Gx⌝ is an analytic part of ⌜Fx⌝).

meanings of the sentences are, the more the argument begs the question. So Quineans could accept an account similar to mine by holding that question-begging comes in degrees and remains dependent on the way in which the meaning of an argument's premises contains the meaning of its conclusion.

The history of analytic philosophy is sometimes described in light of the advancement of, and inexorable retreat from, the linguistic turn. Philosophers, holding that their predecessors had argued their way into obscurity, came to believe that issues of language would ultimately settle important philosophical debates. In its prime, logical positivism held that many philosophical proposals were meaningless while ordinary language philosophers thought they betrayed a misunderstanding of typical language usage. Nowadays, few have such monumental ambitions for language. Although it continues to play a role (perhaps the semantics of 'that'-clauses demands that they refer to propositions, for example), that role has greatly diminished. This paper is a modest plea for the continuing importance of language. Meaning alone may not solve all of philosophy's problems. But, by accepting an account of question-begging in terms of analyticity, we recognize the role that meaning plays in viciously circular argumentation.

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