

## Begging the Question: A Reason to Worry about Theory-Dependence

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To give pieces of evidence (propositional evidence) (E) in support of a theory (T) is to present an argument with premises (P) that are given as reasons to believe a conclusion (C), and where (P)=(E) and (C)=(T). Thus, like any other arguments, it will beg the question if there is a specific kind of dependence between (P) and (C), i.e., between (E) and (T). As such, the fact that our evidence is dependent on a theory (theory-laden) can be a sufficient reason to reject the claim that (E) supports (T).

Presented like this, we find that a good place to start in order to understand the nature of the problems caused by the theory-dependence of our evidence is to study the literature on the fallacy of begging the question. Doing so, I found that some discussions in philosophy of science have been misguided. More precisely, I noticed that that the troublesome relation of dependence between (E) and (T) has often been misidentified and that the appraisal of this epistemic problem has therefore been erroneous.

I shall begin my presentation by explaining why the so-called 'logical approach' to the fallacy of begging the question has failed. The fact is that we cannot conclude that an argument is begging the question simply by looking at the logical relations between its conclusion and its premises. Even arguments of the form *p therefore p* do not necessarily beg the question (Sinnott-Armstrong 1999, 178). This result will allow me to criticise Peter Kosso's similar approach the problem of the theory-dependence of our evidence (1988) and to show why some philosophers were misled into thinking that we should downplay (e.g. Brown 1993, Shogenji 2000) or even deny (Adams 2004) the importance of having independent evidence.

After going through some examples, I shall conclude by explaining why the epistemological approach to the fallacy of begging the question now prevails and why we should treat the problem of the theory-dependence of our evidence in the same way. The

main point is that our evidence will fail to enhance our justification for believing our theory if the only reason we have for believing our evidence is to believe in our theory. There has to be a certain degree of epistemic independence between our evidence and our theory and I am going to argue that it can be obtained even when our evidence implies our theory.

**References:**

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