Some analyses of the broad notion of begging the question and a novel concept

Intro

The situation is this: 1) I have concluded (in a previous essay) that there are at least two senses of begging the question (BTQ[I]), 2) I have concluded that the first identified sense of BTQ is identical to circular logic, 3) I have surveyed a number of sources on an analysis of the second notion, the broad one, of BTQ but found none to my satisfaction, 4) I promised earlier to do an analysis of the broad sense of BTQ.

I will henceforth refer to the strict sense of BTQ as "circular logic" and reserve "BTQ" for the broad sense of BTQ.

By "strict" and "broad" sense, I do not mean to imply that all arguments that are circular BTQ, but this *may* be the case. I will assume neither before analysing.

My intent it so do a reconstruction of the concept of BTQ. The goal is to find clear (or clearer) notions that work well with intuitions of logicians on the matter of whether an argument BTQ is not.

It may be the case that there is no clear notion of BTQ in which case all reconstructions fail to meet the critiria above. If that is the case, I think we ought to invent a clear notion of BTQ since it is useful for discussion. One could ask why such a concept would be useful. The answer is that many discussions come to a halt where the one side is claiming that the other side is BTQ with some argument, but because that there is no clear concept of BTQ, it is very hard to argue that an argument does in fact BTQ. With a clear concept, it becomes easier for anyone familiar with the concept to determine whether an argument BTQs or not.

Reconstructions

#1

Things like this are often said:

I Similar phrases that can also be abbreviated BTQ will be done so, e.g. "beg the question".

> An argument [BTQ] if the only people that agree with the premises are people that already accept the conclusion.

It's not that clear, but I take it to mean this:

> An argument BTQ iff for any person, if that person accepts the premises, then that person accepts the conclusion.

“the premises” in this essay refer to all the premises of the argument but in order to avoid boring prose, I will avoid repeating “all” all the time.

I dislike the talk of acceptance, that is, the use of “accept”, so let's be more clear:

> An argument BTQ iff for any person, if that person believes in the premises, then that person believes in the conclusion of the argument.
>
> $\forall x Bx \leftrightarrow (\forall y Py \rightarrow Cy)$[II]

Are there any counter-examples to this, that is, an argument that does *not* BTQ but where it is the case that for any person, if that person believes in all the premises, then that person believes in the conclusion of the argument? I don't know.

A new concept of BTQ

Giving up on creating a true clarifying definition of BTQ, I will briefly examine what a fallacy is. A fallacy is a kind of argument that there is something wrong with. Let's think of a fallacy as an argument that ought to not convince an ideally rational person (IRP). “convince” here is sort of a success verb, if a person is convinced that means (literally) that the person did not believe in the conclusion before hearing the argument, but did after hearing the argument and having some time to think about it.

Supposing that this is sufficiently clear (maybe it isn't), we can think of what sort of arguments that ought to not convince an IRP. For the sake of simplicity, let's restrict ourselves to deductive arguments (however that is defined). We could then come to believe something like:

> For any argument, if that argument is invalid, then the IRP ought to not be convinced by it.

But also:

> If the argument is circular, then the IRP ought to not be convinced by it.[III]

II Interpretation keys: D,x = arguments, D,y = persons, Bx = x BTQ, Px = x believes in all the premises, Cx = x believes in the conclusion.

Further, we may believe something like this:

> For any argument, if that argument has a premise that the IRP does not believe in, then the IRP ought to not be convinced by it.

All these three are obvious to me.

Perhaps we can get a useful concept of BTQ out of this. Let "target" refer to the person (or persons) that the argument is aimed at convincing. Let's image that the an IRP is in the targets position (even if we may wonder how that IRP got to have those beliefs, if that is even possible). By "being in the targets position" I mean that for any truth-carrier, the target believes in the truth-carrier iff the IRP also does.[IV]

Give that a moment's thought. Now, how about:

> **Proposal 1**
>
> For any argument and any person, if that argument has a premise that the person does not believe in, then that argument BTQ against that person.
>
> $\forall x \forall y \neg Hxy \rightarrow Bxy$[V]

Recall that the point of giving an argument in a rational discussion is to convince the target in a rational way (at least, something close to this). If we give an argument whose premises the target does not agree with, we have failed to produce an argument that is rationally convincing *for the target*. A rationally convincing argument is one whose premises the target agrees with but without agreeing with the conclusion before being made aware of the argument, and after the target has heard the argument, the target begins to believe in the conclusion after some time. In other words, all arguments that are not rationally convincing arguments are fallacies.

This is admittedly a high standard for a fallacy-free argument but recall that giving an argument that BTQ does not imply that the arguer is stupid, unintelligent or something like that. It could be that the arguer did not know that the target did not believe in the premises. Also, many other fallacies are and have been commited by very smart people.

Another very similar definition is this, as inspired by a friend of mine:

III By this all circular arguments BTQ.

IV In other words, the sets of truth-carriers that the IRP and the target believe in are identical. In yet other words: The target shares all his beliefs with the IRP and the IRP shares all his beliefs with the target.

V Interpretation keys: Hxy = x has a premise that y does not believe in, Bxy = x BTQ against y. Rest are the same as above.

Proposal 2

> For any person, another person and argument, the first person BTQ with the argument against the other person iff there is a premise of the argument that the first person knows or should have known that the other person doesn't believe in.
>
> $\forall x \forall y \forall z Qxzy \leftrightarrow (\exists w Pwz \wedge (Kx(\neg By(w)) \vee Sx(\neg By(w)))$[VI]

However, such a definition is different from the first proposal. An argument that BTQ according to proposal 1 can still fail to BTQ according to proposal 2. To see this, simply think of an argument with a premise that the target doesn't believe in, and that the arguer doesn't know this or shoud know this. That argument BTQ according to proposal 1 but not according to proposal 2. Is there any argument that BTQ according to proposal 2 but not proposal 1? No, because: if the arguer (who is the first person) knows that the there is a premise that the target (who is the second person) doesn't believe in, then there is such a premise; in other words: For any P, if someone knows that P, then P. Something very similar can be argued with that the arguer should know that the target doesn't believe a permise. In general, if sometone ought to do something, that implies that they can do it. But in a sense, no one can know what is false.[VII]

Suppose that we grant that that the arguer should know that the target doesn't know a premise implies that there is such a premise, then both disjoints imply that there is a premise, in which case this satisfies the condition in proposal 1. In other words: proposal 1 is logically stronger than proposal 2; the set of arguments that BTQ according to proposal 2 is a proper subset of the same for proposal 1.

Graphical illustration

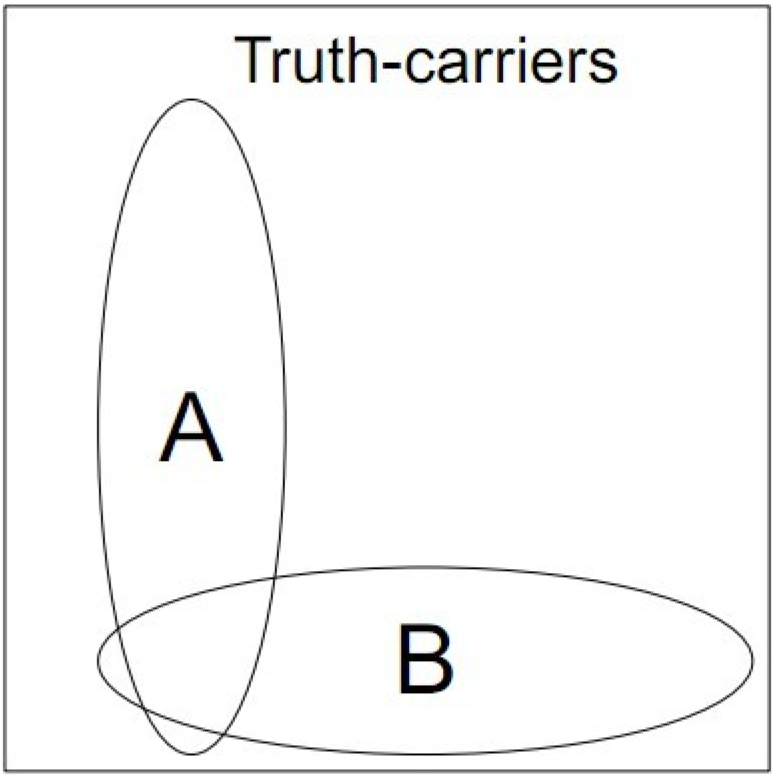
We can illustrate proposal 1 graphically. The illustration shows truth-carriers and two circles marked with respectively A and B. The idea is this: All the truth-carriers inside the circles are believed in by A and B respectively. Those that are in both are believed by both and those that are outside and believed in by neither. Translating the BTQ concept to the illustration, we get a graphical formulation of the notion where A is the arguer and B is the target:

> An argument BTQ against a person (B) iff a premise of the argument lies outside the circle marked B.

VI Interpretation keys: D, x = persons, D,y = persons, D,z = arguments, D,w = truth-carriers, Qxzy = x BTQ with z against y, Pwz = w is a premise in z, Kx(P) = x knows that P, Sx(P) = x should have known that P, By = y believes that w.

VII In other words: For any P, if P is false, then for all persons, that person doesn't know that P.

And, for A to give a non-BTQ argument is for A to give an argument where all the premises lie inside B's circles. Technically the A circle is redundant, but it shows that for A to give an argument he believes is sound and that doesn't BTQ against B, all the premises of the argument has to lie inside circle A (otherwise he doesn't believe the premises of his own argument) and inside circle B (otherwise the argument BTQ against B). Generally, for the argument also to be interesting, then the conclusion has to lie outside B's circle.



Similarly, we could construct a graphical illustration for proposal 2. In that case it would fucntion like there: It is identical to the current illustration except that there are now two circles, C and D, in the B circle that are both subsets of circle B (they should probably overlap too, think about it). These circles represent the truth-carriers that the first person knows that the second person doesn't believe in, and the truth-carriers that the first person should know that the second person doesn't believe in. The graphical formulation of the BTQ notion is then:

> For any person, another person and argument, the first person BTQ with the argument against the second person iff there is a premise of the argument in C or D.

Notes