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Ernest Sosa and virtuously begging the question

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ABSTRACT: This paper discusses the notion of epistemic circularity, supposedly different from logical circularity, and evaluates Ernest Sosa's claim that this specific kind of circular reasoning is virtuous rather than vicious. I attempt to determine whether or not the conditions said to make epistemic circularity a permissible instance of begging the question could make other instances of circular reasoning equally permissible.

KEYWORDS: begging the question, circular reasoning, Ernest Sosa, epistemic circularity, *petitio principii*, reliabilism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 1986, William Alston introduced the idea of 'epistemic circularity', which involves assuming the reliability of a given source of belief during the process of proving the reliability of that same source. Indeed, Alston claims that epistemic circularity is unavoidable during the attempt to provide such proof. Ernest Sosa has recently taken this issue up and has argued that given this kind of reasoning is unavoidable, epistemically circular reasoning is not vicious, but virtuous. Epistemic circularity is, in the first instance, an epistemological problem and because I am focusing here on Sosa's answer to the problem, I begin with a summary of the way in which Sosa believes epistemological problems are variously approached. I then briefly discuss why epistemic circularity necessarily arises as a problem when one has certain epistemological commitments and go on to discuss why Sosa believes epistemic circularity is virtuous rather than vicious or fallacious. In the second half of the paper I treat epistemic circularity as an instance of begging the question and determine whether or not the conditions which are said to make epistemic circularity a permissible instance of begging the question classifies a certain type of circular reasoning as non-fallacious.

2. SOSA'S CONCEPTION OF EPISTEMOLOGY

In his 'Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity' (1994: 264) Sosa divides various epistemological positions into two camps: (1) 'formal internalism', which holds that "a belief can be justified and amount to knowledge only through the backing of reasons or arguments", and (2) 'formal externalism', which is simply the denial of formal internalism, i.e. the denial that a belief can be justified and amount to knowledge *only* through

the backing of reasons or arguments¹. More specifically, Sosa states that an acceptable internalist epistemological account of all one's knowledge in some domain D would be a 'legitimizing' account in the following sense: "*A is a legitimizing account of one's knowledge in domain D IFF D is a domain of one's beliefs that constitute knowledge and are hence justified (and more), and A specifies the sorts of inferences that justify one's beliefs in D, without circularity or endless regress.*" (Sosa 1994: 267, emphasis added) Sosa claims that this cannot be attained, however, for he says that if we adopt the position of the formal internalist,

[i]t is impossible to attain a legitimizing account of absolutely all one's own knowledge; such an account admits only justification provided by inference or argument and, *since it rules out circular or endlessly regressive inferences*, such an account must stop with premises that it supposes or 'presupposes' that one is justified in accepting, without explaining how one is justified in accepting them in turn. (Sosa 1994: 267-8, emphasis added)

Given that such a situation does indeed seem unsatisfactory and unobtainable on its own terms, Sosa believes we ought to be epistemological externalists (according to his definition).

Sosa believes we have limited options when it comes to justifying a belief through inferences and arguments, however. Sosa puts the general situation thus:

Sometimes a justified belief is justified because supported by reasons; reasons that the believer not only *could* have but *does* have...Justifying beliefs need to be justified in turn. And now we have three possibilities. As we consider the reasons for one's belief, and the reasons, if any, for these reasons, and the reasons, if any, for these in turn, and so on, either (1) some ultimate reasons are justified noninferentially, are justified in some way that does not require the support of some ulterior reasons, or (2) there are no ultimate reasons: further reasons always justify one's reasons, at every level, no matter how remote the level, and these further reasons always go beyond any reason already invoked at earlier levels, or (3) there are no ultimate reasons: further reasons always justify one's reasons, at every level, but these further reasons need not go beyond reasons already invoked at earlier levels. (Sosa 2007: 122-3)

Option 1 is foundationalism, which Sosa believes is not ultimately satisfactorily because, as stated, justification rests on beliefs that are in some way supposed to be justified non-inferentially; option 2 is that of infinitism or the infinite regress which is ultimately unsatisfactory because belief can never ultimately attain justification; and option 3 "is that of the circle. One's justifying structure of reasons circles: some reason for a reason at a given level returns us to an earlier level" (Sosa 2007: 123). Given that foundationalism and the infinite regress are out, for Sosa, as possible ways of justifying belief essentially through reasons and argument, the only other option seems to be circular reasoning. Sosa claims that *epistemically* circular reasoning is virtuous and not vicious, however. As such, he claims that it *is* a viable way for one to argue for the reliability of a source of belief through argument and he agrees that arguing for the reliability of our sources is *necessarily* circular. One would be inclined to argue in such a way only if one has certain commitments that classify one as a reliabilist, however. Before discussing epistemic circularity, I therefore briefly turn to the nature of these commitments.

¹ Sosa acknowledges that he uses these terms in a special sense. I adopt his usage because I am only concerned with *his* characterization of our general epistemological situation here. It should therefore be noted that I acknowledge that the way in which Sosa uses these terms is not necessarily consistent with the way in which they are generally used in epistemology.

3. RELIABILISM

In *Beyond 'Justification'* William Alston also acknowledges that when we question the epistemic status of some belief and when providing justification for some belief is limited to providing further beliefs or arguments, these beliefs and arguments can be questioned in turn and so on ad infinitum such that we would never “come to some assumption about which no doubts arise” (Alston 2005: 192). One way in which justification *can* be established and the infinite regress stopped is if we can establish “for an indefinitely large class of beliefs in advance of any critical examination” (Alston 2005: 197) that it makes no sense to question their epistemic status, i.e. to doubt or deny them. This would be to “reach a *stage* at which what is on the table is something that it makes no sense to doubt or deny” (Alston 2005: 196). Such is the attempt to establish the reliability of a given way of forming beliefs such that it can be determined that all the beliefs formed through such a belief forming process are reliable and are therefore unnecessary to question with respect to their epistemic status. Sosa is indeed a reliabilist and, as Noah Lemos rightly notes, “[t]he problem of epistemic circularity arises when we consider how we know whether our sources of belief are reliable” (Lemos 2009: 187).

4. THE NECESSITY OF CIRCULARITY

If I wanted to justify belief P based on the fact that it came from a reliable source, the belief in the reliability of that source would have to itself be justified if ultimate justification for belief P is to be obtained. Proving the reliability of a source involves justifying a belief like Q: ‘Source X is reliable’ by using other beliefs. If one is a reliabilist, then the only way for me to prove Q via argumentation, reasoning, etc., is if I use a belief to justify Q that is itself attained through a reliable source. Therefore, it seems that the reliability of a source of belief cannot be argued for without falling into circularity. Even if I could argue for the reliability of one source by assuming the reliability of another source, I would eventually have to justify my belief that that *other* source is reliable, and doing so would require that I assume some *other* source is reliable and so on until I must eventually assume the reliability of the source in question and, again, enter into a circle. To anticipate what is to come, it should be noted that the circularity involved herein is ‘indirect’, in a sense. What is occurring is not that a claim directly supports itself (P therefore P), but a claim is justified by other beliefs and these other beliefs rely on the claim they are justifying for their own justification (P iff Q; P therefore Q).

5. VIRTUOUS CIRCULARITY

If falling into circularity is inevitable when attempting to prove that a source of belief is reliable, does this mean that it is impossible to show the reliability of a source of belief in an epistemically permissible way? Sosa argues it does not. Sosa believes that there is a *virtuous* form of circular reasoning that we can legitimately use to justify our belief in the reliability of a source. Consider the following scenario:

Suppose W is our total way of forming beliefs. If we believe that W is reliable, $R(W)$, our belief $B:R(W)$ is itself formed by W . And if a belief is justified iff formed in a reliable way, then our $B:R(W)$ is justified iff W is reliable (given that it is formed by W). $B:R(W)$ is justified, therefore, iff W is reliable. (Sosa 1994: 279)

This seems straightforward, but indeed very circular. Sosa's point here is that given we necessarily form beliefs in certain ways, the only way we can justify $B:R(W)$ is by using beliefs which come from source W . While it is the case that all we can do is use the ways of forming beliefs (the sources of beliefs) that we necessarily have given the kind of beings we are, isn't it the case that all this shows is that, as is evident from Sosa's wording above, *if* a source is reliable it can be shown to be reliable using beliefs attained through that same source?

William Alston argues that this poses a problem because we cannot therefore prove the reliability of our sources outright and, as such, this does not help us determine which sources of belief are unreliable and which are reliable, i.e. what we were presumably attempting to accomplish in the first place. Sosa captures the dissatisfaction well so it is appropriate to quote him here:

If we justify our belief in the reliability of our $W - B:R(W)$ – by noting that W itself yields $B:R(W)$, then anyone with a rival but self-supporting method W^* would be able to attain an equal measure of justification through parallel reasoning. They would justify their belief $B:R(W^*)$ by noting that W^* itself yields $B:R(W^*)$. So are we not forced to conclude that someone clever enough could attain a measure of rational justification equal to ours so long as their way of forming beliefs, W^* , turned out to be, to the same extent, coherently and comprehensively self-supporting? (Sosa 1994: 284)

The often quoted example is that one could potentially use beliefs attained through the use of a crystal ball to prove that 'crystal ball gazing' is a reliable source of belief. Sosa's answer to this is interesting.

Sosa claims it is a serious mistake to assume that "*all self-supporting arguments are on par*" (Sosa 1994: 289). Take T to equal 'A belief X amounts to knowledge if and only if it satisfies conditions C ' (see Sosa 1994: 287). Sosa says that if we are to explain how we 'know' T itself, we would have to appeal to theory T , for it explains what something must be if it amounts to knowledge (see Sosa 1994: 289). T is therefore 'self-supporting' in that, given it explains what something must be to amount to knowledge, it explains how it itself can be known. Sosa says something important about this, however. Sosa says:

It is not just *in virtue of being self-supporting* that our belief in T would acquire its epistemic status required for knowledge. Rather it would be in virtue of meeting conditions C . And conditions C must not yield that a belief or a system of beliefs has the appropriate positive epistemic status provided simply that it is self-supporting. For this would obviously be inadequate. Therefore our belief in T *would* be self-supporting, as had better be any successful and general theory of knowledge, but it would not amount to knowledge or even to a belief with the appropriate epistemic status, *simply in virtue of being self-supporting*. (Sosa 1994: 289)

Sosa's point is that, in the above example, T would still need to satisfy conditions C *on top of the fact* that T supports itself. Sosa does say that "[w]e shall never be able really to *have* an explanation of anything without our *having* some knowledge" and therefore " T is something we must *know* if it is to give us real understanding [of how our beliefs can be

of the PES ‘knowledge’], and in offering it we are perhaps, in some sense, ‘presupposing’ that we know it” (Sosa 1994: 288). It seems that the case is similar when it comes to reliability: although it seems to be the case that we have to presuppose that we know what conditions a source must satisfy if it is to be a reliable source, even though we can only show a source to be reliable through epistemically circular reasoning, a reliable source can, *on top of this*, satisfy the conditions necessary for it to count as a reliable source². Presumably, doing so would then distinguish between the reliable and the unreliable sources.

Sosa further argues that once it is understood that the only way to justify our belief that a source is reliable is to argue in a circle “what option is left to us except to go ahead and ‘beg’ that question ... (though ‘begging the question’ and ‘arguing circularly’ may now be misnomers for what we do, since it is surely no fallacy, not if it constitutes correct and legitimate intellectual procedure)” (Sosa 1994: 289). In order to determine whether or not Sosa is right to make these claims, it is appropriate to address the problem of epistemic circularity as an instance of begging the question.

6. MILL, THE SYLLOGISM, AND BEGGING THE QUESTION

Now that we have seen Sosa’s conception of epistemology, been introduced to the idea of epistemic circularity, and have seen why Sosa thinks it is virtuous rather than vicious, I can turn to the second part of this paper where I attempt to determine the nature of the kind of circular reasoning Sosa describes and see if it cannot be classified as a permissible kind of circular reasoning or begging the question.

First, it should be noted that the idea that there are instances of circular reasoning that are not problematic is not necessarily new. In his *A System of Logic*, Mill writes that “[i]t must be granted that in every syllogism, considered as an argument to prove the conclusion, there is a *petitio principii*” (Mill 1973: 184). Mill gives the following classic example of a deductive syllogism:

- (1) All men are mortal,
- (2) Socrates is a man,
- (3) *Therefore*, Socrates is mortal;

Mill notes that the proposition ‘Socrates is mortal’ is contained within the general statement ‘All men are mortal’, i.e. that we would not know that all men are mortal if we did not already know that Socrates is mortal since Socrates belongs to the category ‘man’, which the second premise states. Mill concludes from this that “no reasoning from generals to particulars can, as such, prove anything: since from a general principle we cannot infer any particulars, but those which the principle itself assumes as known” (Mill 1973: 184). Thus in this sense all syllogisms (at least of this sort where particulars are deduced

² What exactly these conditions are and how they are determined is not particularly relevant to the discussion here. What is important is that there are additional conditions potentially being satisfied. Sosa apparently believes that these conditions are presupposed given T is presupposed in some sense. It is possible that Sosa believes that given we must always have some knowledge, presupposing statements like T is something we must do and then, through being susceptible to criticism, determine if it is something we should continue believing.

from generals) beg the question. And indeed Mill believes that what occurs here is not a problematic inference, because what is occurring is not really an inference.

Mill's reason for stating this is based around a distinction he believes ought to be made between what he calls the 'inferring' part of philosophizing and the 'registering' part (Mill 1973: 186). Mill argues that people believe an inference is taking place and we are gaining new knowledge in syllogisms such as the 'all men are mortal' syllogism because people mistake the 'registering' type of philosophizing for the inferring type. Mill states that the inferring type refers to the process that takes place when "[t]he results of many observations and inference, and instructions for making innumerable inference in unforeseen cases, are compressed into one short sentence" (Mill 1973: 187), such as 'all men are mortal'. Therefore, in syllogisms like the all men are mortal syllogism, what Mill believes is going on is not an *inference* from 'all men are mortal' and 'Socrates is a man' to 'Socrates is mortal', but is merely "deciphering our own notes" (Mill 1973: 187) or simply looking to see what the general knowledge we do have, which has been reached via an already carried out process of inference, commits us to saying in particular cases. In this way, then, syllogisms of the 'all men are mortal' kind are not necessarily problematic cases of circular reasoning.

What Mill describes is clearly not the same kind of circular reasoning taking place when beliefs attained through a reliable source are used to prove the reliability of that same source, however. Before attempting to determine the nature of the circular reasoning taking place in this instance, I ought to briefly discuss two different types of begging the question.

The first type of begging the question is where a premise of an argument is equivalent in meaning to the conclusion, and the second is where a premise of an argument is acceptable only if the conclusion has already been accepted. In the above case of Mill, we can see that his analysis claims that the premise 'All men are mortal' is acceptable only if we already accept the claim that 'Socrates is mortal'. Mill's point, however, is that we already have independent grounds for believing both that Socrates is mortal and that all men are mortal because we have witnessed the death of John, James, Archbishop Whately, and the rest. What the 'argument' above does, as Mill states, is determine what something we already know, based on other reasoning processes, additionally commits us to.

7. EPISTEMIC CIRCULARITY AND BEGGING THE QUESTION

The situation is similar to this second type of circular reasoning in Sosa's characterization of epistemic circularity. Sosa argues that we have other reasons for believing our sources of belief are reliable, making it such that the epistemic circularity supporting the belief in a source's reliability is not the only support such a belief has. Sosa argues that it is more consistent of us, more coherent for us, to believe a given source of belief *is* reliable if that source is in fact one of the ways in which our beliefs are formed. In *A Virtue Epistemology* Sosa claims that "[p]rominent among things we hold dear...is the coherence of our minds. When constituted by inter-belief explanatory relations, such coherence goes with the value of understanding. We want our beliefs to be so integrated as to enable answers for our many and varied whys" (Sosa 2007: 113). In 'Philosophical Scepticism and Epistemic Circularity' Sosa says something akin to the following: 'Suppose (e) B(elief): [W is my overall way of forming beliefs]. And compare (f) B:[W is reliable], (g) B:[W is *not*

reliable], and (h) B:[One is unsure whether or not W is reliable]³. Sosa claims that it is “more satisfyingly coherent” for us to believe (e) & (f), than it is for us to believe either (e) & (g) or (e) & (h) at the same time. Being charitable, his point seems to be that if we are necessarily bound to form beliefs in certain ways, i.e. due to the kind of beings that we are and because we necessarily have certain sources which provide us with ‘deliverances’ that we may or may not accept, we are either forced or drawn to assume (perhaps because we seek coherence) that such sources are (generally) reliable. This is perhaps a very questionable assumption to make but it seems as if it is indeed one we all make, for otherwise we would not generally trust our sources of belief and would be less able to function in the world than we seem to. While it would be interesting to question this assumption and draw out some implications of this claim of Sosa’s, I only wish to illustrate that Sosa does in fact believe that we all assume the ways in which we actually do form beliefs (not all the ways in which we can *potentially* form beliefs but the ways we in a sense *have to* due to the kind of beings we are) are (at least partially) reliable ways of forming beliefs because, if we did not assume this, we would in some sense be incoherent. In that we seek coherence, we seek to be in the best possible epistemic situation; therefore we all (must) make this assumption.

The question now, however, is in what way epistemically circular reasoning *further* supports the belief in a source’s reliability and if this circular support is not fallacious. In the above, Sosa likened justifying the reliability of a belief source through beliefs attained from that same source to theory of knowledge T, i.e.: ‘A belief X amounts to knowledge if and only if it satisfies conditions C’ (see Sosa 1994: 287). With respect to T, Sosa says the following:

It would not be long before a philosopher would wonder in virtue of what T itself is a piece of knowledge, and if T is held as an explanatory theory for all of our knowledge, then the answer would not be far to seek: T is a piece of knowledge because T itself meets conditions C. And how do we know that T meets conditions C? Well, of course, *that* belief must meet conditions C in turn. And so on, without end. Is there any unacceptability in principle here, is there any unavoidable viciousness? (Sosa 1994: 287)

Sosa then gives the following examples:

- (A) A belief B in a general epistemological account of when beliefs are justified (or apt) that applies to B itself and explains in virtue of what it, too, is justified (apt).
- (B) A statement S of a general account of when statements are grammatical (or a sentence S stating when sentences are grammatical) that applies to S itself and explains in virtue of what it, too, is grammatical.
- (C) A belief B in a general psychological account of how one acquires the beliefs one holds, an account that applies to B itself and explains why it, too, is held.

Sosa’s point is that T, the case of epistemic circularity, and these above examples are circular in a similar and non-vicious, and hence non-fallacious, way. What is common between them is that they apply to or support themselves. T is self-supporting because T itself, the formulation ‘A belief X amounts to knowledge if and only if it satisfies condi-

³ In the article Sosa does not believe that all these are ‘beliefs’ per say, but for the present purpose I assume that they are to make his point and not get into irrelevant details.

tions C' would have to meet up to its own criteria, i.e. it would itself have to satisfy conditions C, as Sosa stated. T, therefore, in a sense, would have to be an example, indeed it ought to be the prime example, of a belief that satisfies the conditions any belief would have to meet in order to count as knowledge. The argument put forth for the reliability of a source of belief, also, would be an example, again it ought to be the prime example, of an argument whose premises are beliefs attained from a reliable source if the theory is to be consistent and the belief that a given source is reliable is to count as knowledge. Here we ought to return to what Sosa says regarding T, and hence also the case of epistemic circularity and the above examples;

It is not just *in virtue of being self-supporting* that our belief in T would acquire its epistemic status required for knowledge. Rather it would be in virtue of meeting conditions C. And conditions C must not yield that a belief or a system of beliefs has the appropriate positive epistemic status provided simply that it is self-supporting...our belief in T *would* be self-supporting, as had better be any successful and general theory of knowledge [or sentence stating when sentences are grammatical etc.], but it would not amount to knowledge or even to a belief with the appropriate epistemic status, *simply in virtue of being self-supporting*. (Sosa 1994: 289)

With this point Sosa agrees with Mill that circular reasoning cannot be the only reason to accept a belief. This would surely be unsatisfactory. However, if a belief requires that it itself satisfies the conditions that it itself specifies in order for it to count as knowledge, a grammatical sentence, a justified conclusion, or a properly acquired belief from a psychological point of view, then this is required of the belief if it is to be consistent with itself. Indeed as a requirement it is a necessary circularity that must occur in these situations and, as such, is not a fallacy. As noted, the circularity occurring here is indirect, and the support offered by the circularity is not the only support on which the conclusions in question rely. Because of these two qualities the circularity here is very weak to begin with compared to problematic instances such as 'allowing every man unbounded freedom of speech is advantageous to the state because the expression of individual sentiments is highly conducive to the interests of the community' (Whately quoted in Johnson and Blair 81). Ultimately, however, it is the fact that the circularity that occurs here is required in the interest of consistency that makes this a permissible and indeed desired instance of circularity that should therefore be classified as a non-fallacious instance.

8. CONCLUSION

We have seen how the attempt to justify beliefs using inference and argument leads to three situations: foundationalism, the infinite regress, or circularity. Epistemic circularity, the necessity of justifying the belief in a given source's reliability with other beliefs attained through a reliable source, is not vicious, but virtuous because it is a necessary requirement in order to be consistent. As long as the circularity is not the only support these beliefs have, this self-support is not a fallacy but indeed a desired quality of an argument for a conclusion where the conclusion specifies the conditions for when an argument is acceptable. As such, I hope to include this type of circular or self-supporting reasoning as a type that is not fallacious.

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Commentary on “ERNEST SOSA AND VIRTUOUSLY BEGGING THE QUESTION” by Michael Walschots

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this comment, I will present four reactions to Mr. Walschots’s paper. The first is what I call the good news, the second is a puzzle for the model for virtuously circular arguments, the third is a series of concerns I have for the Sosa model for epistemic support, and the fourth is a concern about extending this model to general use in argument.

2. THE GOOD NEWS

The good news is that Walschots is using *epistemic* criteria for argument quality. The epistemic theory of argument is underrepresented in this field, and Walschots’s tack here is correct in taking successful epistemic support to be the model for successful argumentation. The key, though, is to have the right epistemology.

3. THE PUZZLE

Walschots holds that there are virtuous circular arguments. Given the apparatus, I am curious about what he sees as the trouble with the following argument:

- P: Only arguments in which the conclusion does not play a role as a premise or as support for a premise are virtuous.
- C: *Therefore*, There are no virtuous circular arguments

The argument gets some laughs, for sure. But it is serious business. Especially if supplemented with Sosa-style assumptions. Let us assume (with Walschots and Sosa) that reliabilism is true, so if P1 is produced by a reliable belief-producing mechanism, then P is justified. My mechanism is reliable, at least with regards to dealing with issues in logic (I do teach classes in it, too), so I’m justified in believing P. So C, given a few intermediary premises (like the definition of circular arguments), follows.

4. SOME EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

I have three points of concern with Mr. Walschots’s case for epistemic circularity. First, Walschots’s approvingly quotes Sosa’s case against internalist models for justification being a version of the regress argument, and so this rules out circles, foundations and

infinite series of reasons. Regardless of whether this trilemma of unacceptable solutions to the regress problem is correct (I've argued elsewhere that infinitism and foundationalism fare better than their critics have claimed they do), the next move to externalism is nevertheless hasty. The skeptic, precisely Sosa's bugbear, makes no entry here. If the trilemma is valid, then we need one more step between that and externalism, namely, an independent argument for anti-skepticism.

Second, Walschots claims that the circular arguments are 'indirect': "What is occurring is not a claim that directly supports itself." This assumes that epistemic support is intransitive – namely that if there are intermediary propositions between p and itself in p 's justificatory heritage, p doesn't justify itself. I have doubts about this assumption. Without transitivity, we lose the intuition behind *overreaching defeat*. For example, consider the following sentences:

S1: x is a Penguin

S2: x is a bird

S3: x can fly

Some person, Gerald, may reason from S1 to S2. And S2 supports S3, so Gerald may infer S3. But such an inference is a case of *epistemic overreaching*, as Gerald's support for S2 is S1, and even though S2 supports S3, S1 does not. Gerald would be warranted in inferring S3 from S2, only were S1 not to support S2. And putting it this way means that we capture the defeat by invoking transitivity. Consequently, it shouldn't matter how big the circles are, because transitivity shortens them.

3. PRAGMATIC EXTENSION

An old saying in applied ethics is that ethical scenarios called 'lifeboat cases' are bad models for everyday ethics. "Lifeboat ethics makes for bad ethics." (For example, lifeboat cases have you saying things like: *Yes, sometimes it may be OK to let a child die of exposure so you can eat him.*) By analogy, I worry about using a model for answering the skeptic as a model for everyday argument. Especially when the model for answering the skeptic is an apology for breaking what seems a commonplace rule of argumentation. Isn't it also a philosophical commonplace with much anti-skeptical epistemology that when locked in battle with the skeptic, it is OK to fight dirty? Take the regular canard that one can refute the external world skeptic by allowing her the view, but then baking a delicious meal and not allowing her to have it, as it, by her lights, doesn't really exist? Or asking the skeptic about other minds why he bothers to speak about his views. *Ha ha, we say, skeptics are hypocrites ... so they are wrong! Tu quoque* arguments galore! Fighting dirty has its benefits, and so we often ask, *do skeptics deserve any better?* Take the *ad baculum* arguments offered in the Middle Ages, often attributed to Avicenna, that anyone skeptical about the Principle of Non-Contradiction should be whipped and burned until he will admit there's a difference between being whipped and burned and not being whipped and burned!

So take the strategy Sosa and Walshots have here—namely that without these forms of circular reasoning, the skeptic wins. I am not, for one, generally inclined to say that fighting dirty is OK with the skeptic, but that can be put aside for now. The question is simply because it may be acceptable to argue this way with regard to knowledge in general

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(as Sosa deploys this argument only with W, our most widely-considered form of belief-formation), but the question is whether this is appropriate in *non-skeptical* contexts.

My concern is that these sorts of allowances make arguments of precisely the form we take to be textbook cases of question-begging look acceptable. For example, the religious believer says: when arguing with the skeptic, it is appropriate to beg the question, so those skeptical about god's existence get the following (virtuous) argument: *The Bible says that God exists, and the Bible is infallible. So God exists.* There's the old Wittgenstein-inspired line that forms of life can be justified only from the inside, but this is taking that line way too far.