CIRCULAR REASONING entry in *A Companion to Epistemology*, ed. Jonathan Dancy and Ernest Sosa, Oxford, Blackwell, 1992, p. 66.

Circular reasoning is very important and characteristic of all kinds of everyday argumentation where feedback is used. So it is often quite correct and useful — not fallacious, as traditionally portrayed in the logic textbooks. Studying circular reasoning, for example, is very important for artificial intelligence, e.g. in expert systems. Circular reasoning can be used fallaciously, however, in arguments which require the use of premises that can be shown to be better established than the conclusion to be proved. The requirement here is one of evidential priority (see INFORMAL FALLACIES: Arguing in a Circle). Arguing in a circle becomes a fallacy of *petitio principii* or begging the question where an attempt is made to evade the burden of proving one of the premises of an argument by basing it on the prior acceptance of the conclusion to be proved (See Walton, 1991). So the fallacy of begging the question is a systematic tactic to evade fulfillment of a legitimate BURDEN OF PROOF by the proponent of an argument in dialogue by using a circular structure of argument to block the further progress of dialogue and, in particular, to undermine the capability of the respondent, to whom the argument was directed, to ask legitimate critical questions in reply.

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