

The hidden weapon of persuasion

Advanced Apologetics Network,
ELF, Wisla, 2025



3 months ago, a lady told me...

We can't put God in
human categories
because they are
very limited...

What's going on here?

1. Is there persuasion?

2. Is there an argument?

3. How does it work?

We can't put God in human categories because they are very limited...



The hidden weapon of persuasion:

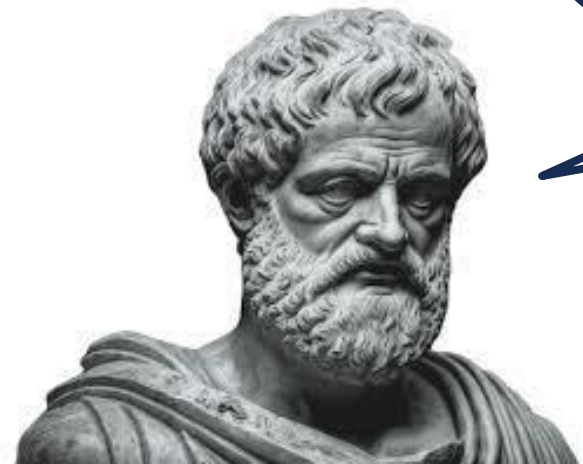
We can't put God in human categories because they are very limited...

ENTHYMEME

Everyone who persuades by proof in fact uses either enthymemes or examples. **There is no other way...**

Enthymemes are **the substance of persuasion.**

Aristotle, 'Rhetorics'



ENTHYMEME:

An enthymeme is a **syllogism** (a three-part deductive argument) with an **unstated premise or conclusion** that the audience is expected to supply

Syllogism: how arguments work

All men are mortal.

Premise 1

Socrates is a man.

Premise 2

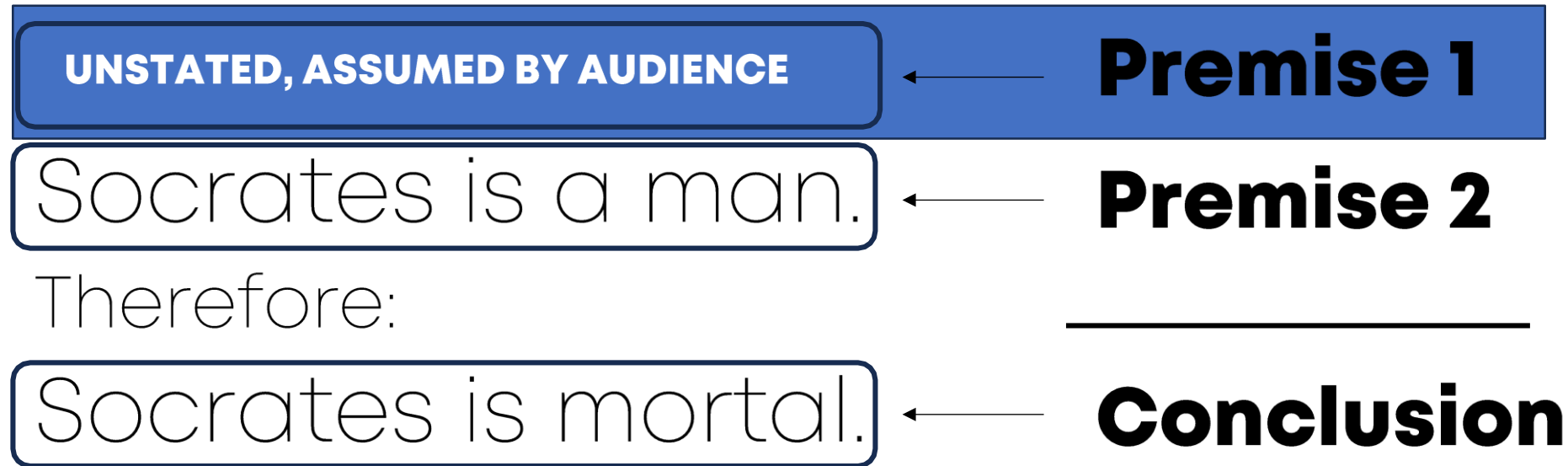
Therefore:

Socrates is mortal.

Conclusion

In everyday language nobody would say:
Socrates is mortal, because he is a man,
and all men are mortal

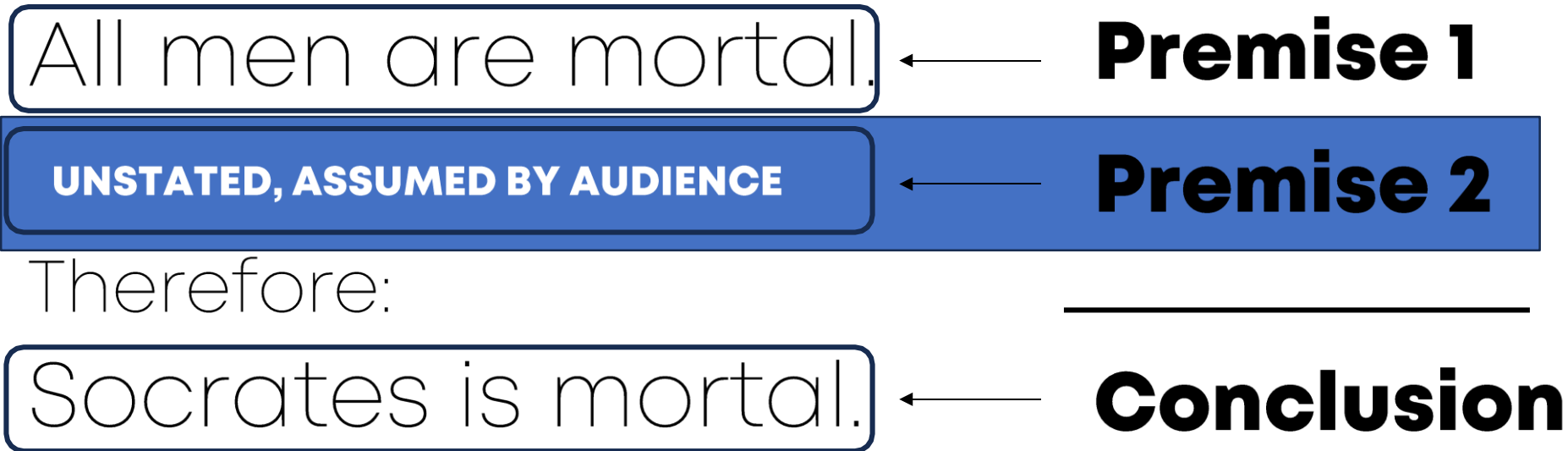
Enthymeme:



In everyday language:

Socrates is mortal, because he is a man

Enthymeme:



In everyday language:

Socrates is mortal, because all men are mortal

Enthymeme:

All men are mortal. ← **Premise 1**

Socrates is a man. ← **Premise 2**

Therefore:

UNSTATED, ASSUMED BY AUDIENCE

Conclusion

In everyday language:

Socrates is just a man and we very well know that all men are mortal

The enthymeme is a syllogism ... whose function is rhetorical persuasion.

Its successful construction is accomplished through the **joint efforts of speaker and audience**, and this is its essential character.

Lloyd E. Bitzer

"Aristotle's Enthymeme Revisited"



The hidden weapon of persuasion:

Enthymemes are extremely powerful because they let listeners (readers) co-design & complete the argument by themselves

What's going on here?

1. Is there persuasion?

2. Is there an argument?

3. How does it work?

We can't put God in human categories because they are very limited...



Let's dissect the argument:

Human categories are very limited

← **Premise 1**

What's assumed here ??????????????

← **Premise 2**

We can't put God in human categories

← **Conclusion**

Everyday language:

We can't put God in human categories
because they are very limited...

The full argument:

P1. Human categories are very limited

P2. God is limitless, endless, transcendent

Therefore

C. God cannot be put in human categories

Our Response: Question every part

P1. Human categories
are very limited

P2. God is limitless,
endless, transcendent

Therefore

C. God cannot be put in
human categories

Our Response: Question every part

P1. Human categories are very limited

P2. God is limitless, endless, transcendent

Therefore

C. God cannot be put in human categories

Q1: Very limited? What do you mean?

Q2: How do you know they are limited?

Q3: Is the statement “human categories are limited” a human category? Can we then trust it?

Our Response: Question every part

P1. Human categories are very limited

P2. God is limitless, endless, transcendent

Therefore

C. God cannot be put in human categories

Q1: What do you mean by God?

Q2: How do you know what God is like?

Q3: 'limitless', 'endless' –these are also human categories, are they not?

Q4: Your idea of God seems very monotheistic. What do we do with all religions that don't believe in God? This premise is not valid for a Buddhist for example.

Our Response: Question every part

P1. Human categories are very limited

P2. God is limitless, endless, transcendent

Therefore

C. God cannot be put in human categories

Q1: Even if human categories can't fit everything about God, how do we know that they can't help us know something about him? You also seem to speak about God in human categories and you sound quite confident?

Q2: If God wants people to know him and is also all-powerful, is it possible that he chooses to reveal himself through human categories?

Our Response: Question every part

P1. Human categories are very limited

P2. God is limitless, endless, transcendent

Therefore

C. God cannot be put in human categories

Q1: Very limited? What do you mean?

Q2: How do you know they are limited?

Q3: Is the statement “human categories are limited” a human category? Can we then trust it?

Fallacious arguments ... are
seldom completely stated, or
their want of cogency would
be more quickly recognized

John Neville Keynes
'Studies And Exercises In Formal Logic'



Let's play 😊

Group 1. "There are so many religions in the world, - Christianity cannot be the only true one."

Group 2. "We don't need the 'God' explanation anymore - we've got science!"

Group 3. "How can I be a Christian, when Christians have done so much evil in history?"

Group 4. "I can't believe a religion that tries to control people through fear from hell"

Group 1: There are so many religions in the world, -
Christianity cannot be the only true one."

Premise 1: If multiple conflicting religious claims exist,
none can be exclusively true.

Premise 2: Multiple conflicting religious claims exist in
the world.

Therefore

Conclusion: Christianity cannot be the only true
religion.

Group 1: There are so many religions in the world, - Christianity cannot be the only true one."

This argument contains several unstated assumptions, including:

1. That religious diversity itself is evidence against any particular religion's exclusive truth claims
2. That religious claims are necessarily mutually exclusive rather than potentially overlapping in some truths
3. That the quantity of competing claims diminishes the possibility of one being correct
4. That truth in religious matters must either be universal (all religions are true) or nonexistent (no religion is true)
5. That the existence of multiple perspectives on truth means there cannot be a single correct perspective

Group 2: We don't need the 'God' explanation anymore – we've got science

Major Premise: If science can explain natural phenomena, then explanations involving God are unnecessary.

Minor Premise: Science can explain natural phenomena.

Therefore

Conclusion: explanations involving God are unnecessary.

Group 2: We don't need the 'God' explanation anymore – we've got science

This argument contains several unstated assumptions, including:

1. That scientific and theological explanations operate on the same explanatory level and are therefore in competition
2. That explaining the mechanism of how something works eliminates the need to explain why it exists or its ultimate cause
3. That "explanation" is a zero-sum game where only one type of explanation can be valid
4. That the value of belief in God is primarily as an explanation for natural phenomena

Group 3: “How can I be a Christian, when Christians have done so much evil in history?”

Major Premise: One should not identify with or join a group whose members have committed significant evil acts throughout history.

Minor Premise: Christians have committed significant evil acts throughout history.

Therefore,

Conclusion: one should not identify with or join Christianity.

Group 3: “How can I be a Christian, when Christians have done so much evil in history?”

This argument contains several unstated assumptions, including:

1. That the actions of some Christians throughout history accurately represent the teachings and values of Christianity itself
2. That historical misdeeds by Christians invalidate the truth claims of Christianity
3. That identifying with a group means endorsing all actions ever taken by members of that group
4. That Christianity as a belief system is responsible for (rather than misused in) the evil acts committed in its name
5. That the evil done by some Christians outweighs the good done by others

Group 4: I can't believe a religion that tries to control people through fear from hell

Major Premise: Religions that attempt to control people through fear are not worthy of belief.

Minor Premise: Christianity attempts to control people through fear of hell.

Therefore,

Conclusion: Christianity is not worthy of belief.

Group 4: I can't believe a religion that tries to control people through fear from hell

This argument contains several unstated assumptions, including:

1. That the primary purpose of hell doctrine is social control rather than a warning about consequences
2. That fear-based motivation is inherently invalid in religious contexts
3. That the teaching of hell can be separated from the broader Christian worldview and theology