

# **The Uses of Argument**

**by Stephen Toulmin**

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**ADAPTED FOR USE IN VAISNAVA DISCOURSE**

**by Suhotra Swami**

## I. Fields of argument

- A. Essence of most arguments: assertion vs. challenge
  - 1. I say "Krsna is God."
  - 2. You say, "Why should I believe you?"
  - 3. I give evidence for my assertion, and establish conditions where they apply.
- B. The \*field\* of an argument is its "logical type:"
  - 1. The type of assertion;
    - a. Imperative and attitude assertion.
    - b. Empirical assertion.
    - c. Analytic assertion.
    - d. Value assertion.
    - e. Supramundane assertion.
  - 2. The kind of evidence employed;
  - 3. The qualifications that impinge upon the conclusion.
- C. Aspects to be considered in assessing the field:
  - 1. The mode of argument (modal terms).
    - a. Are we arguing possibilities? ("It could be.")
    - b. Are we arguing necessities? ("It must be.")
    - c. Are we arguing that something is good?
    - d. Are we arguing that something is bad?
  - 2. The evidence (sources of valid knowledge, or pramana):
    - a. Sense perception;
    - b. Logical doubt;
    - c. Authoritative testimony (guru, sastra, sadhu).
    - d. The above (a-c) are used in formulating the reason, factual example and the backing of the assertion.
      - i. The reason of the assertion "Krsna is God" is, "Because the Vedic scriptures define God as the source of everything" (then "Krsna is God").
      - ii. The factual example of the assertion is, (Because--then--) "since all things--both matter and spirit--

emanate from Krsna."

- iii. The backing of the assertion is, (If--then--because--) "it is confirmed in \*Bhagavad-gita\* 18.8, \*aham sarvasya prabhavo\*."

- 3. Refinement of the assertion.
  - a. Time?
  - b. Place?
  - c. Circumstances?

Toulmin's terms compared to nyaya terms:

"Every theme must necessarily be explained with reference to pratijna, or a solemn declaration of the purpose of the treatise. The solemn declaration given in the beginning of the Vedanta-sutra is athato brahma-jijnasa, which indicates that this book was written with the solemn declaration to inquire about the Absolute Truth. Similarly, reasons must be expressed (hetu), examples must be given in terms of various facts (udaharana), the theme must gradually be brought nearer for understanding (upanaya), and finally it must be supported by authoritative quotations from the Vedic sastras (nigamana)." (Adi 7.106)

Assertion--pratijna (fact)

Reason--hetu

Factual example--udaharana (factual example)

Refinement of the assertion--upanayana (bringing the theme nearer for understanding)

Backing--nigamana (authoritative quotations)

"It is completely useless to try to understand God by our limited knowledge, and an intelligent man understands this. We should become submissive and try to understand that our position is that of a very insignificant segment in this creation. The words namanta eva indicate that we are just to become submissive in order to understand the Supreme from a reliable source. And what is that source? San-mukharitam: from the lips of realized souls. Arjuna is understanding God directly from the lips of Krsna, and we have to understand God through the lips of Arjuna or his bona fide representative. We can understand the transcendental nature of God only from a reliable source. That source may be Indian, European, American, Japanese, Hindu, Muslim, or whatever. The circumstances are not important. We just have to try to understand by hearing and then try to put the process to practice in our daily lives. By becoming submissive, hearing from the right source, and trying to apply the teachings in our daily

lives, we can become conquerors of the Supreme." (Path of Perfection, Chapter 9)

Assertion: We can understand the transcendental nature of God only from a reliable source.

Reason: It is completely useless to try to understand God by our limited knowledge, and an intelligent man understands this.

Factual example: Arjuna is understanding God directly from the lips of Krsna, and we have to understand God through the lips of Arjuna or his bona fide representative.

Refinement of the assertion: That source may be Indian, European, American, Japanese, Hindu, Muslim, or whatever. The circumstances are not important. We just have to try to understand by hearing and then try to put the process to practice in our daily lives. By becoming submissive, hearing from the right source, and trying to apply the teachings in our daily lives, we can become conquerors of the Supreme.

Backing: The words namanta eva indicate that we are just to become submissive in order to understand the Supreme from a reliable source. And what is that source? San-mukharitam: from the lips of realized souls.

#### IT IS A FACT THAT

We can understand the transcendental nature of God only from a reliable source.

#### BECAUSE

It is completely useless to try to understand God by our limited knowledge, and an intelligent man understands this.

#### SINCE

Arjuna is understanding God directly from the lips of Krsna, and we have to understand God through the lips of Arjuna or his bona fide representative.

#### TO CLARIFY,

That source may be Indian, European, American, Japanese, Hindu, Muslim, or whatever. The circumstances are not important. We just have to try to understand by hearing and then try to put the process to practice in our daily lives. By becoming submissive, hearing from the right source, and trying to apply the teachings in our daily lives, we can become conquerors of the Supreme.

#### IT IS CONFIRMED THAT

The words namanta eva indicate that we are just to become submissive in order to understand the Supreme from a reliable source. And what is that source? San-mukharitam: from the lips of realized souls.