

PRESUPPOSITIONAL APOLOGETICS

The Problem of the One and the Many

Free Grace Missionary Bible Church
Presuppositional Apologetics

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

When we gaze out into the night sky on a clear night we are confronted with an incomprehensible vastness that takes our breath away. There are so many individuals – particulars – stars, stars and more stars. Yet we call it the “universe” using a word derived from Latin meaning “one-turning” by which we ascribe to the many individuals a unity which we surmise. But surmise it we must, since we are created in God’s image, we must imagine the world to be created by Him and for Him. But some try to suppress the knowledge of the true God with varying degrees of success. Today we will look at the methods used by the free world in their so-called thinking, which is thinking but a far cry from thinking God’s thoughts after Him – which is what we must do to think them accurately, correctly, in submissive harmony with the everlasting.

The universe is a unity in diversity and one thing in the midst of many, many things. It is vast beyond measure. Recent images have made it clear that it is very, very ... very large and super-distant galaxies exist that confound our understanding. Yet we know that here and there are alike in the hands of the Almighty God who “tellethe the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names” (Psalm 147:4). Such knowledge is too wonderful for us, it is beyond our ability to even know, what is the number of the stars, and to have names for each? This is wonderful indeed – but this is the God with whom we have to do!

The God of the Bible is not one to leave Himself without witness; He is not one to leave Himself without a testimony among the lesser things. He reveals Himself as the Triune God, infinite, eternal and to every good purpose, alive and active in every good work. It is He who reveals Himself in our thoughts about Him, and everything that we have thoughts about. It is He who is the ideal of order, of society. It is He who gives the moral structure to the world, its individuals relating to Him as Judge, to each other in varying ways but always to Him as Judge. To some His Son stands as Surety, and they are in union with Him, and as righteous as He is. The Spirit confirms them in place but passes by the others who stand in the place of renegades – those who are by nature opposed to God. God makes Himself known to everyone but has grace on some to save them. The point here is how God makes Himself known to everyone – how He reveals Himself in the little things and the big things.

The point of today’s study is how God makes himself known to every person and the ways will probably surprise you in their commonality and in their profundity. I mean, the more basic we become, the more we have to put our thinking caps on, which is weird but that’s the way it is.

Historical Context

Greek philosophers sprang up around the time of Nebuchadnezzar, around 600 BC. They sprang up full of questions and their questions are still ones which indeed continue to vex philosophers of our own day. They are the very simplest questions that confront us but to which we are far from considering. The questions are perennial and they profoundly affect each of us. We are involved with them on a daily basis as we live and move in them yet we never think about them. Well, today we will!

Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes were all primarily interested in cosmology, and the origin and substance of the world. They all believed the world was made of a fundamental element called an arche. They attributed the arche of the world to, respectively, water, and air governed by nous (mind or intelligence).

Thales had a view of water as somehow essentially central to the world. It is the nature, the *archê*, the originating principle. For Thales, this nature was a single material substance, water. Thales considered that things changed into water and water changed into things. Aristotle offers some conjectures as to why Thales might have believed this (Graham 29). First, all things seem to derive nourishment from moisture. Next, heat seems to come from or carry with it some sort of moisture. Finally, the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and water is the source of growth for many moist and living things. Some assert that Thales held water to be a component of all things, but there is no evidence in the testimony for this interpretation. It is much more likely, rather, that Thales held water to be a primal source for all things—perhaps the *sine qua non* of the world.

Anaximenes thought the central aspect of matter was air. Anaximenes seems to have held that at one time everything was air. Air can be thought of as a kind of neutral stuff that is found everywhere, and is available to participate in physical processes. Air is fundamental to all things, or all things can be thought of as derived from air.

And all of this became the foundation of the belief in aether – that is, along with belief in matter and fire, we have the **fifth element** or **quintessence**, as the material that fills the region of the universe beyond the terrestrial sphere. The concept of aether was used in several theories to explain several natural phenomena, such as the propagation of light and gravity. Aether differed from the four terrestrial elements; it was incapable of motion of quality or motion of quantity. Aether was only capable of local motion. Aether naturally moved in circles, and had no contrary, or unnatural, motion. Aristotle also noted that celestial spheres made of aether held the stars and planets. The idea of aethereal spheres moving with natural circular motion led to Aristotle's explanation of the observed orbits of stars and planets in perfectly circular motion. In the late 19th century, physicists postulated that aether permeated space, providing a medium through which light could travel in a vacuum, but evidence for the presence of such a medium was not found in the Michelson–Morley experiment, and this result has been interpreted as that no luminiferous aether exists.

Clearly there is no aether – but we must presuppose something. We are blessed to be able to understand the reality, that we presuppose the Lord as unity and diversity – as the absolute unity and absolute diversity – but what about others? What do they presuppose? And have we made any progress since the days of these men?

Practical Significance

We have three choices. Our thoughts are either (1) equivalent with the divine; (2) equivocal with respect to the divine; (3) analogical with respect to the divine. If our thoughts are equivalent with respect to the divine, then the divine is quite limited! The divine is not limited by the qualifications of limitation and our best thoughts ebb too low for consideration as divine. We have thoughts that are true though and we cannot deny that we know the truth. We are not equivocal with respect to knowledge. We do know. If we say we do not know, we must affirm that we know that. We do know. So, that's why we say that we are analogical with respect to knowledge, with respect to God's knowledge. God knows the sum and

substance of everything that is – there is no teaching God anything, neither in depth, nor breadth, nor length, nor height. He knows all, is in all things, is for all things, through all things. But we know many of the same things, truly, but honestly-speaking, we know them in part, partly, partially, but really and truly. We don't deny the truths that we know but we don't know like God knows. His knowledge is complete. We who are finite, have truth in part or particular measure. We think God's thoughts after Him – they are true in a way that exchanges the eternally known for the temporally known.

Analysis

Consciousness

The primary way in which the revelation of God is given unto men is via the mental activity that is conducted most inwardly and most privately. It is of the form, A is B, p is q, that car is blue, this cheese seems delicious. Predication is the most natural form of mental activity and it is one in which the brightness of the Trinity shines forth. Predication emerged when ancient philosophers began exploring reality and the two entities that divide it: properties and the things that bear them. These thinkers investigated what the division between thing and property amounted to. It was argued that the relationship resembled the logical analysis of a sentence wherein the division of subject and predicate arises spontaneously. It was Aristotle who posited that the division between subject and predicate is fundamental and that there is no truth unless a property is "predicated of" something.

We see the A, the p, the car or cheese as something existing in itself. We take "this" for the subject of the sentence, the proposition we are considering. The subject is the place in which the action takes, in which we engage.

The one refers not to a number but to unity and oneness; in metaphysics, it has usually meant the absolute, the supreme Idea for Plato, the universe for Parmenides, Being as Such for Plotinus, and so on. The *one* can be a separate whole, or it can be the sum of things in their analytic or synthetic wholeness; that is, it can be a transcendent one, which is the ground of all being, or it can be an immanent one.

We take the "is" or "seems" or "should be" or whatever it might be as connecting the previous idea with the following, the subject with the predicate. This verb relates the subject to the predicate. In this case, for simplicity, we will take the verb as one of being, existing, etc. since this is the common approach and is quite useful for this study.

Mary and John **are** *my friends*.

The sky **was** *blue*.

I **am** *taller than most people*.

The birds and the beasts **were** *there*.

The predicate is where we have a general term that applies to multiple subjects. The idea of reference is given a centrality. We hold that the word exists in general, or that objects participate in it. We mentioned above blue or delicious – these are terms of generality, words that apply to multiple things in varying measures. Lots of things are blue or delicious. The list of blue things is very broad, of course there are shades of blue, but the precise blue exists or we suppose it to exist, by itself. The term delicious applies to the item itself and to many other items.

Taken together, these words form a simple proposition which has the unique property of being true or false. It must be true or false if we speak of it, the car is blue or appears blue, or not, the cheese is or is not delicious. What exists as a sequence of words is also a simple thing which cannot be divided into parts. How can you divide in part the truth that the car is blue or that the cheese is delicious? The expression of the truth is the key role of propositions, though of course they often deal falsely with us, we take the truth of a proposition as the central nature of reality. The **truth** is the property of being in accord with fact or reality. In everyday language, truth is typically ascribed to things that aim to represent reality or otherwise correspond to it, such as beliefs, propositions, and declarative sentences.

It is amazing that these words have sense about them. It is possible to imagine our thinking as giving glory to God and another to realize that all your giving of glory to God depends upon His gracious kindness in giving the thought, that God is worthy to be glorified, making it worthy to glorify Him who is beyond and within all thoughts of Himself. Praise be to Him, who is three – we come to the Father by the Son through the power of the Holy Spirit and who is One. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are One God – and God is the ultimate in simplicity. The simplicity of the One is the ultimate simplicity = One which is One. He who is three is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit – He who is One is one and these three are One in a very profound way.

It is the central nature of reality which divides the brute beast from the human creature, the ability, the necessity of making sense out of things. It is this which separates man from the creatures he oversees. He who is alienated from God has to make sense of things. But the sense he is willing to make is far from the reality and he is by nature very far from the reality of himself before God. But the situation in which he finds himself is the situation in which the apologist makes God known. It is the Lord who makes Himself known in the very fundamental way in which we conduct ourselves. It is God who reveals Himself when we open our mouths and declare the truth concerning Him. It is that separation from beasts which makes a man, the nature of truth within him revealing the nature of God, reveal the truth concerning God. It is a man's sin which keeps him from God, from realizing that God is three-in-one and one-in-three and beyond his comprehension. A man's natural state is to be alienated from God and therefore under the wrath of God and in a sad posture and desperate condition relative to God.

Those who are alienated from Him suffer from distortions of reality as reality extends from Him and is measured in relation to Him. They are self-deceived in a way that exalts self above God as ultimate. As self is exalted above God, above the knowledge of God, self-deception becomes the essential reality. When self-deception imposes reality because of God's holiness and God's triunity as necessary aspects of it, then self-deception is the easiest way out; it is the only way out. So those who are alienated from him are self-deceived because they are forced to treat Him as non-essential and non-necessary. The necessity of a self-justification before Him is key, it is required yet it is not appearing, and conscience tells the truth. Conscience reveals the truth about a soul before God, ultimately as guilty before Him.

“The easiest thing of all,” said Demosthenes, “is to deceive oneself; for what a man wishes he generally believes to be true” (Olynthiaca iii.19) and there is nothing he wants to believe more than his own goodness and righteousness. Plato is the first philosopher to mention the phenomenon, when he represents Socrates as saying, “For there is nothing worse than self-deception—when the deceiver is always at home and always with you” (Cratylus 428d).

The traditional paradigm of self-deception is modeled after *interpersonal* deception, where *A* intentionally gets *B* to believe some proposition *p*, all the while knowing or believing truly not-*p*. Such

deception is intentional and requires the deceiver to know or believe not- p and the deceived to believe p . On this traditional mode, self-deceivers must (1) hold contradictory beliefs and (2) intentionally get themselves to hold a belief they know or believe truly to be false. The process of rationalization, however, can obscure the intent of self-deception. When a person, who disbelieves p , intentionally tries to make himself believe or continue believing p by engaging in such activities, and, as a result unintentionally misleads himself into believing or continuing to believe p via biased thinking, he deceives himself in a way appropriate for self-deception.

The key though is the heart of the issue – the knowledge of the creature. Knowledge is the construct of truth from the elements of reality but truth is a simple thing, not composed, not divisible. So the act of predication is at its heart a trinitarian action. It is taking the everyday experiences of daily life and forming from them the truths or falsehoods of our daily lives. But this is a Divine act. Whether the coffee is too hot, or whether God is real, all form in a single thought. But the thought itself presupposes the Triune God. It presupposes the existence of simplicity in the midst of complexity.

The forming of truths within ourselves make us like God though we are temporal and unworthy of course. Our minds close on some truth and we are immediately like God but, of course, not like God in His fundamental nature. But we form truths! We figure out what we hold as truths in a very wishy-washy way though we are all rock solid in our grounding of God as One and Many. We are absolutely firm in Him even though we may deny Him and all His ways. Many, many deny His name – yet still hold to basic truths. They are self-deceived in that they believe lies about the Almighty but truths about simple and complex things. The smartest people in the world are self-deceived – absolutely delusional in the way they think about and approach God. But these people are absolutely capable of determining what is particularly true or false and making a buck off it.

Conscience

God has constructed a world in which His ways are obviously preferable yet other ways are possible. It is possible but not likely that your next-door neighbor is a murderer but it is absolutely certain that he or she is a liar. And, being a liar, nothing else is needed to bring them under judgment. Their conscience makes them feel guilty – it is a part of them but generally agrees with God. Now conscience is what we appeal to when we make the person to whom we are talking aware of their knowledge of God. Conscience is not aligned with self or with promotion of self but with the truth and with righteousness, personally considered, that is, with respect to the person. (That is, a conscience might not be accurate in everything but is generally considered to be accurate.) And every person has one and everyone's conscience is speaking to them though some have muted, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, (1 Timothy 4:2).

The Reformed Christian will subject his conscience to the written word of God. He will not subject his conscience to the other forces or choices that surround him. To others, the conscience is a mystery – the voice of some novelty in a world of many voices, and the subject of much confusion. Many others have a conscience with some concern, they have a sense of it as not good. It is to these that we confess a Savior, one in whom is both righteousness and redemption, one who satisfies the wrath of God and provides for us a proper standing in His presence. It is your inner sounding board in the person himself with whom you are speaking. To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; but even their mind and conscience are defiled. (Titus 1:15)

What is the conscience? A site puts it simply, “A *conscience* is a built-in sense of what's right and what's wrong. That sick feeling in your stomach after you lied to your brother about borrowing his skateboard?? That might be your *conscience* bothering you.” The online Stanford Encyclopedia says that “Through our individual conscience, we become aware of our deeply held moral principles, we are motivated to act upon them, and we assess our character, our behavior and ultimately our self against those principles.” It is the conscience, ultimately, that leads a person to Christ, after they come to the end of themselves but it is the conscience that starts a man on the road to Christ. He feels himself guilty before God whom he does know and suppresses that knowledge or collapses under it and flees to Christ for salvation. But even others show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them) (Romans 2:15).

The conscience always speaks with some authority. It is the conscience which speaks opposite to the man, when it is in his best interest to do the wrong, yet the conscience speaks its fill as one having authority. The one speaking with authority is speaking of right and wrong. It speaks of guilt as being a burden but it is understood that God is good. In Him is good and evil is what is contrary to Him – thus He is and it is His voice which speaks through the conscience. The conscience is not the voice of God but it is His witness in the soul – it speaks with authority of right and wrong. Thus, it presupposes right and wrong. The conscience presupposes God and (all of Reformed theology) but it is sitting there in the person opposite you who denies the faith and all that goes along with it. What can we do?

There simply can't be a contrary word spoken about the conscience. It is the moral sense, it is the inherent ability of every healthy human being to perceive what is right and what is wrong and, on the strength of this perception, to control, monitor, evaluate and execute their actions. But we become aware of our conscience when we do wrong because it speaks with clarity against our actions. It speaks with authority against our choices when we choose unwisely. But then we are obligated to silence it – to make sure that the conscience does not bother us. But how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Hebrews 9:14)

Despite his contrary profession, even the unbeliever knows what may be known about God from nature and conscience; God has clearly revealed Himself to every man. All knowledge, even the knowledge possessed by the unbeliever in unrighteousness, must be founded upon the accepted truth about God. Therefore, both the unbeliever's knowledge and God's common grace should be used, not to encourage neutrality, but to press home the demands of God at every point. [Bahnsen, Greg. Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith (p. 40).]

The Situation on the Inside

The ground of the warfare is turned hard against the Christian. The ground of the unbeliever is hard against the truth of Christ. The unbeliever does not believe in God, that He sent His only-begotten Son to live in perfect righteousness, and to die and live again for the believer. But he believes many truths and confesses many of the truths that you hold dear. You may agree on everything except this one thing, that Christ died to save the elect, that those in union with Him are not condemned but are saved by grace through faith. And that is because he loves his sin.

The unbeliever always makes himself the measurer of reality. He considers himself to be a fair judge but naturally judges himself unfairly when it comes to the important things. He judges the world and all that

lies in it as equal or greater than the Almighty, of more worth than Him. He believes that he must earn his own salvation, that is the way that it seems to him: that God requires him to do this and to do that and that then he will (magically) be saved. He believes that he is good and does good most of the time but that occasionally he falls short.

But the Christian knows this isn't the case at all. He earnestly contends with the unbeliever that even one sin will carry him away, will make him guilty before God – and he has many sins. He has much guilt.

The One and the Many

The one and many is perhaps the basic question of philosophy. Is unity or plurality, the one or the many, the basic fact of life, the ultimate truth about being? If unity is the reality, and the basic nature of reality, then oneness and unity must gain the upper hand over group, individualism over combinationalism, a particular over the whole. If the many, or plurality, best describes ultimate reality then there is priority in multitude, in diversity. If the one is ultimate, then individuals are sacrificed to the group. If the many be ultimate, then unity is sacrificed to the will of many, and anarchy prevails.

Clearly we live in a world where there is balance between the one and the many and so the question is avoided – it is a theoretical question. But the importance of the question remains: is reality focused on the one? Or is it focused on the many?

Since both the one and the many are equally ultimate in God, it immediately becomes apparent that these two seemingly contradictory aspects of being do not cancel one another out but are equally basic to the ontological trinity: one God, three persons. The choice of unity or diversity is a false one. Again, since temporal unity and plurality are the products and creation of this triune God, neither the unity nor the plurality can demand the sacrifice of the other to itself. [Rushdoony, Rousas John. *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (p. 19).] Both unity and diversity are key elements in the fabric of this life and we must be humble to accept it.

Life lived out in terms of the one realizes itself out in terms of unity. Islam, Eastern Christianity, any group that places the unity of the group above the individuals in the group falls under this heading. Let's pick Islam – there is a unity, a singularity in the idea of God. God is one and that is all there is to it. The desire for unity becomes sacrosanct, it becomes the all-in-all. The unity that this idea produces is very great – Islam rules its individuals. They become nothing in the overarching scheme to promote the idea of God as foremost. The unity in the idea of God produces a unity among the people and this unity among the people is absolute. The earthly leader is exalted above measure and it forms a very tight structure. The tight structure of authority absorbs the individual. Individuality is stamped out – the person makes the prayer times, the meeting times, etc. and they are part of the group – but the group doesn't really matter, the unity matters. The individuals don't matter, the group matters. Every element of Islamic society represents the unity of the one people in the forefront of God, reduced to a simple unity because God is a simple unity – if not then God is dependent on something else, but Islamic theology is insistent that God is God and the creation then tends to be like the Creator. And so they tend to subject themselves to their religion for the sake of the God of the religion.

Life lived out in terms of the many is the normal kind of life that people live. People live for themselves, for the many desires of the individual life. Maybe they go to church but church is just one thing among many for them. It soothes the conscience and fills the soul but is not the all-in-all. Christ is the all-in-all

but there is no union with Christ here. There is no unity among their many thoughts. Take a particular Roman Catholic, who adopts both Scripture and the word of fallible men (the pontifical pronouncements) – he is a man who holds to many, not to one. He comes to the difficulties of life in a way that depends on the many. He never can allow the Scripture to speak for itself nor does the voice of man speak for itself. He has the voice of the earthly man speaking for himself so the word of God becomes of no effect. He must go and search the writings of men to find particular pronouncements about certain subjects, certain rules, certain this or that.

We love God first and foremost. But the Christian lives for others first, because of God, but because of self also. The great command is to love Him with our mind, our will, our soul and all of ourselves but the second commandment is like the first. In it we are to love others as we love ourselves. This presupposes the proper love for self before the love for neighbor and the relationship with God before all – love both to God and to fellow men as we love ourselves. There is a love for God which is first, is all, but devolves into a love for mankind. This reflects the unity of God and the diversity of God. In the first principle there is a proper balance of unity and diversity and this must work its way out into the life. There is the unity of the church – the body of Christ when all men and women are in union with Christ – the unity and diversity implicit in the resurrected life.

There is the proper life before God in terms of the intellectual – the first things become the last things. The foundation of the life is seen to lead its way to the outworking of the life by the simple principle of how the life is lived. If there is true life in the person, then it will be seen to be in the One and the Many.

Conclusion

The key thing to note in all of this material is that the problem of the One and the Many involves the individual in every aspect of his life. There is the simple formulation of propositions which is done constantly and results in the direction of the life. But it is beyond the scope of most people to think about. Even modern philosophers have abandoned consideration of the question of the One and the Many. There is the work of the conscience which cries out to be heard. These form the foundation of the system and the structure in the life is one of three items. They are the unity of all things, the diversity of all things, or the structure of the One and the Many. They are very deep and profound elements of the psyche – the ground on which everything is cast.

What he builds from the foundation is the outward life – the inevitable comprehension of the first things results in the outward expression in the life. What a man thinks of God and his place before Him results in his building of the life in terms of the first things he experiences, his inner life becomes his outer life. What he thinks of God in his inner soul is worked out in the outer life. And all of it will be placed before Him in judgement on that Day.

Bibliography

1. <https://iep.utm.edu/thales/>
2. <https://iep.utm.edu/anaximenes/>
3. <https://greekreporter.com/2022/11/07/ancient-greece-milesian-school/>
4. Bahnsen, Greg. The Apologetic Implications of Self-Deception .
5. Rushdoony, Rousas John. The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy (p. 19).