

"The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism," by T. LaB. Cherbonnier (Harvard Theological Review)

1. Definition of "anthropomorphism": "any theology that conceives of God in terms of those characteristics which are distinctively human: the capacity for discriminating judgment, the exercise of responsible decision and choice, the ability to carry out long-range purposes."
 - a. some scholars feel that the anthropomorphism of the Bible is only symbolic for the "wholly other."
 - b. some scholars feel that man has projected himself of his wishes onto the heavens, calling it "God." (This is a psychological explanation of anthrop.) No doubt, for some persons this is the case; but the validity (truth) of a belief does not depend upon a person's motives for holding it. To disparage a position solely on the grounds of a person's motives is to argue ad hominem.
2. A Second Ambiguous Term is "supra-personal."
 - a. if "supra-personal" means "personal to the nth degree" it simply means a special kind of anthrop.
 - b. if all anthrop. is removed from "supra-personal," how is the result different from "sub-personal"?
3. An Obstacle to a Philosophical Examination of the Biblical God: Some persons say that the use of reason in religion is immoral and lacks humility. In effect, he is saying, "To disagree with me is morally wrong." That statement certainly lacks humility!
4. The problem of language. Words can be used within mystical philosophies to mean one thing, and within biblical philosophy to mean something else. We have often failed to understand these differences.

The Word

Mystical Meaning

Biblical Meaning

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| 1. infinite | not finite; not visible, not invisible "wholly other" | inexhaustible |
| 2. unlimited | God is beyond words, beyond the visible, beyond the invisible; only negatives can apply to God; he is beyond predication. God does not act. | God does things <u>per excellence</u> ; his abilities are beyond understanding. All things are possible. |
| 3. one | God is the sole existent oneness. | God has an unmistakable personal identity with a constancy of purpose. |
| 4. unknowable | God cannot be known; he or it is "wholly other" and beyond words. When man becomes one with God, even this is unknowable, because there is nothing and no one to be known. | God can be known, when and if he chooses to make Himself known. In this sense, He is mysterious. He always is separate, though fellowship with Him is possible. |
| 5. invisible | non-physical | usually unseen |
| 6. timeless | beyond time; eternal | everlasting |
| 7. changeless | beyond change; non-physical | consistent |
| 8. transcendent | beyond space and time; non-physical | sovereign |
| 9. immanent | diffused throughout the universe | participant; He acts |

Problems

The best language is silence; however, its meaning cannot be communicated, and in fact, mystics usually speak. But, when they speak they use language negatively or analogically. How can one judge the truth or validity of negatives or of analogies?

Truth can be communicated via events, statements meant literally, and even myths that illustrate a literal truth. Any statement can be refuted with adequate empirical evidence.