There is a trend these days of claiming that the Rg Veda 1.164.46 verse has been “appropriated” and is being “misused” by those who are called “The Sameness Myth Perpetrators”.

Ékaṃ sāvīthāḥ ādi

This transliterates to —

Índraḥ mitrāḥ váruṇaḥ agnīm āhur átho divyāḥ sá suparṇo garūtmāṇ;  

Ékaṃ sāvīthāḥ v adanti agnīm yamām mātariśvānam āhuḥ.

When translated, it means —

They called him Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, Agni; yea, he is heavenly Garuḍa, who has beautiful wings.

That which is One, the sages speak of as Multifarious; they called him Agni, Yama, Mātariśvan.

Here Indra, Mitra, Varuna et al are Vedic deities.

Here’s a nice discussion on the topic.

The crux of it lies in the difference in perspective between a non-dualistic worldview and a dualistic one. In the Advaita (non dual) view, the Absolute Truth/Reality is Non-dual. That means, there is no scope for duality being independently existent, therein. There is no object separate from the subject. There is no world separate from the Awareness from whence it seems to arise, and into which it seems to disappear again.

But the world we live in seems to be dualistic. We are the subjects that encounter innumerable objects every day. Every moment seems to be filled with objects, and consequently our experiences of the world. So in the context of this dualistic world filled with objects, there are many theories abound, about where from did all this come about? Is there a creator somewhere? Is there no creator, but is all a strange and happy accident?
Different religions, founded on the teachings of different individuals tried to answer these questions. The religions that sprang from Judaism, along with it – namely Christianity and Islam, claim there is One Creator, who created the universe, and who is separate from us, the individual souls, who will, after death, either suffer in eternal damnation in a realm called “Hell”, or enjoy unspeakable pleasures and bliss in a realm called “Heaven”. These are a very black or white type of binary system, where one either follows the rules set forth by the religion (effectively by God), or suffer the consequences. Within Christianity and Islam, also there are the edicts to “spread the words of God”, so that all souls get a chance to do the “right things” and go to heaven. The claim is that this attitude is from that of compassion and love, because each individual soul has the responsibility to love all others like his/her own self.

While I am deliberately being a bit reductionistic here, this is how these religions (called Abrahamic religions) are perceived by the camp who claims that Indian spiritual masters end up diluting the message of Dharma by subscribing to the “Oneness” message. The Indic traditions are called the Dharmic traditions, which include dualistic traditions such as the “Abrahamic traditions” mentioned above. But they also have traditions that espouse pure Nondualism (Advaita Vedanta, Kashmir Shaivism), materialistic (Carvaka), as well as views in which there seems to be no ultimate source of the universe (Buddhism).

Most of the teachers who teach from the perspective of “Ekam Sat”, seem to be from the Advaita (or Non-duality) camp.

What is objectionable, apparently is the part – Ekam sat vichad vichatur to point out that “The existent/Reality is One, the wise call it by different names”. Those who use this to illustrate that the Truth (Absolute Reality) is Non-dual and it’s manifest appearance is One (Ishvara), who different sages call by different names. This is then extended to other religions, such as Christianity, Islam etc.

The bone of Contention

So what seems to be the bone of contention? Is it the claim that all traditions point to the same source? Source of what? Of existence would be my understanding. What exactly is that? Is that the same for Advaita Vedanta as it is for Christianity or Islam?

The answer is not simple. It is yes and no.

Why yes? Because Advaita clearly articulates that the world as it stands, is an appearance. It arises in Pure Awareness and disappears in it. There IS NO world separate from THAT (The Non-dual awareness). So all these traditions who articulate a creator God, are not wrong per se.
But it is also no. Because, the other traditions seem to stop at the creator God, without resolving further to non-duality. They seem to stop at the separateness of God and individual Soul.

The thing is, Advaita accommodates this perspective too. **There is Ishvara, the first principle that appears to emerge from the non-dual awareness, from which manifests the Universe (or even the multiverse).**

So this One, “Ishvara” is similar to the “One Creator God” of the Abrahamic Traditions. As such, Ishvara too is Infinite and since the universe comes from him, he too has infinite attributes, which is the result of the interplay of the three gunas (Sattva, Rajas and Tamas) in various permutations and combinations. This Ishvara is called “Saguna Brahman”, or Brahman with Gunas. As Pure Awareness, however Ishvara is Nirguna or without attributes whatsoever. Then he is known as Nirguna Brahman. Within the Advaitic traditions there are many theories too which address the questions of “how everything came to be from Pure Awareness without any properties” (eg: ajātavāda, drṣṭi-sṛṣṭi vāda or in Non-vedantic systems via mātrikāchakra, etc). But that is not germane to this topic.

So how exactly are the teachers who say, that all theistic traditions point to the same One, wrong?

It is not so much about whether they are wrong or not, but more about political implications of such statements. It is true, that one of the core tenets of the newer “abrahamic” religions is to spread the word, to get non-believers to believe in their version of the One. So, it is to stave off these waves of conversion, is why the position of these teachers vis-a-vis “The One” is found to be objectionable.

The fear is that, because the abrahamic religions are far better organized and have hundreds (or thousands) of years of experience spreading via proselytizing, the Dharmic traditions, when “diluted”, are ripe for digestion. In other words, the world is a market, and the religions are commodities that are being sold to us human beings. Now if you are educated, and view the world from this perspective – of geopolitical gamesmanship and market-orientation, it is sure to get your blood boiling. Or at least make you consider the implications on the tradition you belong to, your way of life (if you subscribe to a Dharmic tradition).

**NOTE:** I use “” for the term “abrahamic” as several Jewish friends have indicated that they don’t like Judaism to be categorized as “Abrahamic”.

**Is the Truth One?**

It then comes down to this. **Is the truth One? Meaning, is that which is purportedly being pointed to, by these religions and Advaita and other dharmic traditions, the same One?**
As we have seen earlier, the “Creator God” has a place in Advaita Vedanta as Saguna Brahman. Or even as a deity with specific characteristics (as in Brahma of the Hindu divine trinity). Who has said so? Many teachers and avadhootas such as Sri Ramkrishna, the yogis from the Kriya Yoga tradition – Sri Yukteshwar Giri, Paramahamsa Yogananda; other masters with huge followings such as Sri Satya Sai Baba, Neem Karoli Baba and so on have said so.

So if someone contests Oneness as a Truth, they are contesting with the avadhootas. Then one might be given to ask ‘How can we corroborate or reject the subjective experience of anyone, let alone these Masters who have already given up their mortal shells?’

The answer is in the question itself. Subjectively experience the truth. This is not something you can use logic to reason out. It is in the field of Direct Experience. Those who have, know it to be true. Those who don’t, simply haven’t worked on it yet. Just remember, these masters had certain qualities that made them hugely beloved of the masses. Their followers number in far greater than tens of thousands, and millions have received spiritual succor from their teachings and presence through the years.

**The teachers are the Self waking the jivas up**

However, the teachers who talk about Oneness, don’t view the world from the perspective of geopolitics and market-orientation. Their objective is to help the individual entity (jiva) realize his/her true nature – The Limitless, Non-Dual Self. All they are doing, is pointing us to that Truth that is our true identity. Their position is that which will fructify the highest purushartha – Moksha, or Liberation from the cycle of birth and death. They see, after waking up to their true nature, a world full of suffering. And see every being as non-different from their own Self. There are many awakened ones who don’t do anything at all. And then there are others who take it upon themselves to try and hasten the awakening of the aspects of their Self who seem to be suffering so.

In face of the jiva’s suffering, all other considerations become secondary.

So when critics of these masters and teachers state that “The Paramarthika (Absolute) viewpoint has no place in the vyavaharika (conventional) material world”, that too is from the perspective of ignorance (of one’s true Nature). To those who are still stuck in the prisons of their own delusions (irrespective of which tradition or religion they subscribe to), these masters seem to be the ignorant fools.

The thing to remember is this – Oneness is not Sameness. That the source is One, is undeniable, if one follows the right teachings. That doesn’t mean the teachings have be of any particular denomination. The right teaching is that which points the individual back to the Self. Even the Dualistic religions have offshoots that point to this. They are called
“mystical schools”, given that direct experience/apperception is not “normal” in those religions, and hence “mysterious”.

That is the reason, often these teachers, make the “right teachings” easy for people to accept, irrespective of the religious background they come from. It is like this – if travelers are dying of thirst in the desert, and you have water, would you deny one over another, based on whatever notions people might hold about the “worthiness”? Isn’t it a fact that if you don’t give water to the thirsty, they will suffer? So then, if you are truly compassionate, you will not withhold water from any of these thirsty desert travelers.

In my humble opinion, contemplative and meditation oriented teachings are better for “waking” up. However, total surrender of Bhakti Yoga (or complete devotion based surrender) is also a very powerful tool, and in fact, the contemplative teachings lead to that eventually.

But, for every thousand such critics, perhaps there is one individual who wakes up. The fact is that not everyone is ready for Self-knowledge. But still, the knowledge will make it’s way to the one (jiva) who is ready, irrespective of the objections, or the hurdles put in it’s way.

These teachers are the mechanism of delivery as well as are the Truth, the Self itself, speaking to the “individual ignorant beings” (who are also none other than the Self itself).

Among the critics are also those who have a strong background in the śāstras, but are still unripe in their understanding and experience (or lack of experience/sākshātkaśa thereof). To those who think that the Self is to be found in śāstras, I am sorry to inform you, that you were never not the Self. What is the point of blindly memorizing and studying these śastras, quoting verse after verse, without knowing what they point to? It would be better to contemplate on the material in the śastras and wake up instead. It is said that the bondage of the śāstras – śāstra vāsanā, is the most difficult to get rid of, and is ultimately a hurdle in the realization of the Self.