

Chapter 1

What Is Philosophy?

The word *philosophy* comes from two Greek roots: *philo*, meaning “the love of,” and *sophia*, meaning “wisdom.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines philosophy as “the love, study or pursuit of wisdom, or of knowledge of things and their causes, whether theoretical or practical.” The *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* defines philosophy as “literally, the love of wisdom; in actual usage, the science which investigates the facts and principles of reality and of human nature and conduct; specif., and now usually, the science which comprises logic, ethics, aesthetics, metaphysics, and the theory of knowledge.” In common usage in our culture, persons are said to be *philosophical* when they think and ponder about things, trying to understand why things are as they are.

Historically, philosophy and philosophizing have had close relationships with religion. A religion is a pattern of life and thinking, and every person of normal intelligence has a religion. Essentially, a person’s religion is that person’s beliefs and values, his or her habits of thinking, feeling and deciding. The word *religion* seems to come from the Latin *religare*, “to bind.” What binds a person is his vows, contracts, and social obligations in one sense, but in a deeper sense one is more bound by his or her habits of thinking and feeling. Since every normal human has habits of thinking and feeling, every person has a religion. A person becomes philosophical when the person thinks about his or her habits of thinking and feeling, to analyze and to deliberately accept or change or control such habits. A person who pursues a habit vigorously and very persistently is said in our language to pursue it *religiously*.

Philosophy emerged as a discipline named and separated from religious musings in ancient Greece. The first philosophers tried to give an account of the universe and its origins by thinking about and observing the world around them, both the natural and the social world. This thinking and observing, called *philosophy*, gave

rise to science. The *Oxford English Dictionary* says that science is “knowledge as opposed to belief or opinion.” More specifically, science is knowing which is not merely personal and is related to observations of the natural world which any person of normal abilities can perform. Science depends upon the independent verification and acceptance of ideas by more than one person.

Each of the so-called sciences of our modern world has emerged from philosophy as a separate discipline when its methods and procedures have been regularized and a body of conclusions has been socially recognized. The first science to emerge from philosophy may have been astronomy, followed by physics in general. These were recognized as special disciplines in ancient Greece. Chemistry emerged from “natural philosophy” in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Psychology and sociology emerged in the late nineteenth century. Linguistics emerged in the twentieth century.

Mathematics is not a science (because it does not rely on the observation of any natural phenomena) but is a species of systems of ordering things. Mathematics and philosophy have been partners in bringing forth each of the new sciences. Philosophy has claimed logic as one of its provinces, but logic turns out to be another system of order, and it can be considered as a branch of mathematics, or vice versa.

Philosophy and philosophizing in our modern times resolve down to asking and answering fundamental questions which cannot be resolved by scientific or mathematical means. The fundamental questions are:

1. How do we humans know? This question gives rise to the philosophical area of epistemology, the study of knowing. We will treat first personal knowledge, that which we know for ourselves by ourselves. Then we will treat social knowledge, the areas of science and history, wherein the social acceptance of ideas by a peer group is important to though not always necessary to acceptance of the ideas as legitimate science or history.

2. What are the nature and limits of science? Examination of science itself is not something which can be accomplished by a science; thus it falls to philosophy to examine science. We will

pursue an understanding of science as it occurs in our times as part of this inquiry into philosophizing.

3. What are the nature and limits of history? Neither science, nor history itself, can answer these questions, and again it falls to philosophy to examine them. We will pursue these questions in this work as part of understanding philosophizing.

4. What is real? This question gives rise to the philosophical area of metaphysics, the study of existence questions which cannot be resolved by scientific means. The answers to metaphysical questions are often part of the fundamentals of a given science. Every person's thinking is based within a metaphysical framework.

5. What should each person do to be good and wise? This question gives rise to the philosophical area of ethics. Ethics is to be distinguished from morals. Ethics is the discussion of the theory of moral standards. Morality is the observance or non-observance of a particular moral standard.

6. What is the basic framework of our thinking? This question gives rise to the analysis of worldviews. Each worldview is the combination of conclusions about epistemology, metaphysics and ethics. There are probably as many worldviews in this world as there are individual human beings. The study of worldviews does not constitute a recognized separate division of philosophy in the modern world, but the topic is often considered as part of philosophizing and will be treated separately in this work.

We shall also consider cornerstones of good thinking and philosophizing which we can take from the scriptures. The holy scriptures have been given to us for the very purpose of guiding our thinking as we pursue our way in this complex world. A wise person will search and profit from these writings, which I personally deem to be the most important writings in this world. Having read much of the wisdom literature of the world, it is my personal conclusion that the standard works of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are the writings we need to read the most, the most often, and to which we should give the greatest heed. To consult them when philosophizing about this world is wisdom indeed.