

Philosophy

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Philosophy (the "love of wisdom") originated in the Western world in ancient Greece. The attempt to find wisdom by ancient thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle led them also to investigate the world (nature), the unseen world (metaphysics), and how we know (epistemology). Wonder about nature through progressively refined epistemological procedures led through the centuries to modern scientific methods. As philosophers developed standards for accurate description and generalization, new sciences were born and detached themselves from philosophy: the first was physics, and the latest is linguistics. But the basic problems of epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics (including aesthetics and the philosophy of religion) dominate present philosophy as much as they did in ancient times. Although the solutions are more varied now, the basic issues remain the same.

Latter-day scriptures do not present a philosophical system, but they do contain answers to many classic philosophical issues. These scriptures preclude ex nihilo creation, idealism (immaterialism), a chance theory of causation, and absolute determinism. They affirm the eternity and agency of the individual person, the necessary existence of evil apart from God, a nonrelativistic good (righteousness), and the doctrine that all mortals are the offspring and heirs of God. God is affirmed as a perfected physical being who governs all things in pure love and who continues to communicate with his children on earth by personal revelation.

Observers of the LDS position have ascribed philosophical labels and tendencies to it, but that position usually will not fit neatly into the stock answers. It is empirical, yet rational; pragmatic, yet idealistic; oriented toward eternity, yet emphasizing the importance of the here and now. Affinities are found with the Cartesian certainty of personal existence, the positivist insistence on sensory evidence, the Enlightenment emphasis on elimination of paradox, and the postmodern respect for the "other." The ultimate standard for all being, truth, and good is Christ himself.

Contemporary analytic and existential movements in philosophy have had little impact on LDS thought, not because it is not aware of them, but because it has different answers to the questions they pose. The knowledge of God is established through careful experimentation with God's promises, which results in tangible consequences, culminating in the possibility of seeing God face to face. Existential angst is recognized and met by personal guidance from God to establish a path to righteousness and fulfillment, the general features of which each person must follow, but with individual parameters. The relativism of situational ethics is answered in spiritual assurance and power to do those things that are eternally worthwhile. Mind-body dualism is answered by the material nature of spirit (more refined matter) ([D&C 131:7](#)).

Answers to the questions How may I know? What is the seen world? What is the unseen world? and How shall I be wise? are all answered personally for every fully participating Latter-day Saint. The equivalent of epistemology in an LDS frame is the ordinances, focusing on the ordinance of prayer. Through the ordinances and in connection with other epistemologies come all

of the light and knowledge sufficient to live a spiritually successful life. Questions about the natural world are answered by one's culture as corrected by personal revelation. One must have some guidance on questions of metaphysics, and such is found in holy scripture and confirmed to each individual through personal revelation. The ultimate question as to how to be wise is answered both in general and in particular. The general answer is that to be wise is to love God with all of one's heart, might, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as God loves us ([D&C 59:5](#)). The particular answer is to repent of sinning and to live by the whisperings of the Holy Spirit and the counsels of the living prophet ([Isa. 50:10-11](#)).

While LDS culture does not encourage philosophizing directly, every LDS person is encouraged to become a profound theologian. Becoming such necessitates a heavy commitment to active study "in theory, in principle, in doctrine" to search out the weighty matters of time and eternity ([D&C 97:14](#)), which include the basic questions of the philosophers. The imperative "study it out in your mind" ([D&C 9:7-8](#)) is a standard for all LDS persons, not just for academics. "Time, and experience and careful and ponderous and solemn thought" (*TPJS*, p. 37) are not inimical to but are the preface to and foundation for personal revelation.

Bibliography

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