

[1975, *In Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Merrill C. Tenney, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.]

**PHILOSOPHY** (φιλοσοφία, etymologically, *love of wisdom*). Traditionally the study of logic, the basic principles of science, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics. In a wider sense, the general principles of any subject can be called its philosophy. Approaching a misuse of the word, the philosophy or education means merely the policy of school administration; and a “philosophy of life” designates any individual's preferences, no matter how poorly systematized. Inspired though it be, Ecclesiastes (q.v.) is an example of this popular meaning and has little to do with the subject matter of professional technical philosophy.

The reason for these shades of meaning is that philosophizing is generalizing, and no authority can fix the degree of generalizing necessary to merit the name.

The meaning of the word in Colossians 2:8 is hard to determine. It could possibly refer to Gnosticism or, perhaps, mean only ethics, for in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent., the Gr. Schools had sunk to their nadir and discussed little else.

The common element in all generalizations is a claim to knowledge. Therefore the crucial question of philosophy is—How is knowledge possible? Attempts to justify knowledge are called epistemology.

Metaphysics, the theory of being (not the beings of plants or botany, not the being of animals or zoology, no even the being of inanimate matter, but of being without qualification—being as such), is sometimes said to be the basic subject; but even Thomism, which makes such a claim, stands or falls with its theory of learning. The answer to the question—What do you know?—provokes the further question—How do you know? Beyond this, no question can be asked. Therefore, epistemology is the basis of philosophy.

There are two very general types of epistemology. First is empiricism, whose thesis is that all knowledge is based on experience. The majority of empiricists equate experience with sensation; others all for non-sensory aesthetic or religious experience.

The second general type of epistemology has no good single name. Perhaps rationalism is as good as any. Its varieties unite on the principle that not all knowledge is based on experience. In one way or another, knowledge is gained from sources other than sensation, chiefly the mind itself. Thus some of these philosophers assert the existence of innate ideas. For example, it may be said that the law of contradictions or the idea of God is inborn. Kant taught that the mind has a priori forms. Sensation is essentially chaotic; it becomes intelligible only after the mind arranges it by these forms. Augustinians and Platonists rely on intellectual intuitions. Their strong point is that logic, ethics, and aesthetics cannot be derived from experience because experience at best tells us what is, whereas these subjects speak of what must or what ought to be. Furthermore, all experience is limited, but knowledge must include universal judgments.

At the present time, the most active schools of philosophy are Logical Positivism, a strongly scientific school; the philosophy of Analysis, largely confined to semantics; and existentialism, an utter chaos of radically individual decisions. The older schools are more or less in eclipse.

The Scripture does not discuss these subjects explicitly and technically. Various Christian philosophers believe that one can see philosophical principles presupposed by the text. The Thomists, for example, think that Romans 1:20 requires empiricism and justifies the cosmological argument. Calvinists have historically made the knowledge of God—not the knowledge of sensory objects—basic, and hold that Genesis 1:26 and Romans 2:15 presuppose innate ideas, or a priori forms.

G. H. CLARK