

JOSEPH SMITH AS PHILOSOPHER.

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INTRODUCTION.

In its broadest sense, philosophy includes all that man may know of the universe—of himself and of the things about him. To be worthy of its name, a system of philosophy must possess certain comprehensive, fundamental principles, which, if clearly understood, make intelligible to the human mind any or all of the phenomena in the universe. The simpler these foundation principles are, the greater is the system as a philosophy. In the words of Spencer, "Philosophy is knowledge of the highest degree of generality," or "completely unified knowledge."*

It is through the possession of general natural laws, around which all minor laws cluster and find explanation, that man obtains power over nature, and a full understanding of her ways. For example, it would be a herculean labor, involving infinite pains, to trace out in detail the motions of each heavenly body. If the law of gravitation is understood, it is really unnecessary to attempt such a labor, for the law of gravitation explains all the motions of planetary or stellar bodies. The law of gravitation is a philosophical principle of great generality.

It is to be observed, that the great laws of nature are inferred only from a number of lesser laws that have been gathered by man. A generalization which is not built upon numerous confirmatory observations, is at best an uncertain guess, which can be accepted only when demonstrated to be correct by numerous isolated

* *First Principles*, pp. 133 and 136.

experiences. The rational philosopher proceeds from the many to the few; he groups and groups again, until the wide, fundamental laws have been attained.

In olden days, and at times today, this method was not pursued. A philosopher, so called, would assume that a certain statement or idea were true. Upon this idea an elaborate, speculative, philosophical superstructure was reared. If by chance, and the chance usually came, the fundamental notion were shown to be false, the whole system fell with a crash into the domain of untruth.

It is the glory of modern science that by its methods, innumerable facts, correct so far as present instruments and man's senses will allow, have been gathered; and, that present day philosophy is built upon these certain facts. The errors, if any exist, of this philosophy lie not in the foundation stones, but in the inferences that have been drawn from them. Modern philosophy rests upon the truths of the universe, and not upon the wild speculations of men.

The purpose of this article is, first, to point out the generalizations that modern philosophy accepts as explaining all that happens in the universe; then, to show that the fundamental doctrines laid down by Joseph Smith are identical with those of modern philosophy, and that in many cases the Prophet anticipated the scientists in the full and correct statement of many of these laws. If the argument is convincing, it will certainly be a strong evidence of the divine nature of the work of the Prophet Joseph Smith. For nearly six thousand years the philosophers of the world guessed at the fundamental truths of the universe, without hitting upon the truth as revealed by science. If Joseph Smith did succeed in building a true philosophy, as judged by the modern light of knowledge, he was certainly something more than the greatest thinkers of the age preceding him—he was inspired of God. As in other fields, so in the domain of philosophy, "Mormonism" will drive all other "isms" to cover. In no sense does this brief article attempt to outline the whole of "Mormon" philosophy.

THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTION OF THE UNIVERSE.

The philosophy of science, which is the basis of all rational philosophy, rests upon the doctrine of the indestructibility of matter. According to science, matter cannot be destroyed, and it is

unthinkable that it ever was created. True, matter may appear in various forms: the tangible coal may escape through the chimneys as an intangible gas; water may vanish into vapor; gold may unite with acids to form compounds entirely unlike gold. However, the weight of the coal in the gases passing through the chimney is the same as the weight of the coal fed into the stove; the water vapor in the air weighs precisely as much as the water that was in the vessel; the gold in the compound weighs the same as the metallic gold used; in every case matter has been changed into another form, but has not been destroyed.

Along with this fundamental principle, science holds the doctrine of the indestructibility of energy. Matter of itself is dead and useless; it is only when it is in motion or in the possession of energy that it can take part in the processes of nature. Matter without energy is not known to man; however inert it may be, it possesses some energy. The ultimate particles of all things,—rock and plant, and beast and man—are in motion; that is, they possess energy. The immediate source of energy for this earth is the sun, though the ultimate source of universal energy is not known.

Energy may appear in various forms, as light, heat, electricity, magnetism, gravitation and mechanical motion; and each of these forms of energy may be changed into any of the others. In every change, however, there is no loss, but simply a change of condition. That which men call energy, the vivifying principle of matter, is indestructible. It has never had a beginning, and shall never have an end.

To the mind of man, however, a motion independent of something in motion, is inconceivable. An ocean wave without water is nonsense. It is equally difficult to conceive of energy which is immaterial, passing from the sun to the earth, through empty space. There must be something between the earth and the sun, which carries the energy. Such reflections have led the thinkers to the belief that all space is filled with a subtle medium, now called the ether, through which energy passes in the form of waves. Every new discovery in science has tended to establish the correctness of this theory. Today, few doctrines of science are so well established as that of the universal ether. The ether is a refined kind of matter which fills all space, and permeates all

things. It is in the table on which I write; in and through the ink; between the ultimate particles of the glass of the ink bottle. This earth, and all heavenly bodies, are simply suspended in the all-and-ever-present ocean of ether. By the agency of the ether, energy is carried from the sun to the earth, and may be carried anywhere in space. Light, heat, electricity, magnetism and gravitation are all various manifestations of ether motion.

A word is spoken. The physical act of producing sound causes a disturbance in the ether, which is carried on in the form of ether waves. On through all space, radiating from the place where the word was spoken, they go. The spoken word can never die. The ether ocean has it in its keeping. Thus it is with all our earthly deeds. Marconi disturbs the ether with his instruments; the ether waves fly with lightning speed into the whole universe. With another instrument, properly tuned, anywhere on this earth, one of the escaping waves may be caught, and the message read. So, also, when the proper receiving instrument is discovered, may the spoken word be read. The ether ocean is an imperishable and absolutely faithful record of all that happens in the universe.

On these three doctrines, the indestructibility of matter, the indestructibility of energy, and the existence of the universal ether, rest primarily the explanations of the phenomena of nature. Hand in hand they stand, an almost perfect example of the greatness of the human mind.

Does the religion founded by Joseph Smith rest upon the same or similar laws? "Mormonism" claims that it embraces all knowledge; that there is no essential difference between matter and spirit, between the physical and the spiritual. If so, that which is fundamental in all external nature must be fundamental in theology. To the very beginner in "Mormon" theology, it is a familiar fact that Joseph Smith taught that matter is eternal, and has not been nor can be created. Matter is coexistent with God. God, himself, is material, in the sense that his body is composed of a refined kind of matter. In the fundamental laws that underlie all nature, there is perfect harmony between science and "Mormonism." Few religions can say as much. In most systems of theology, it is assumed that the ruling power, God, can create matter. In "Mormon" theology he can only organize it.

It is not quite so well understood that the doctrine of the indestructibility of energy lies also at the foundation of "Mormon" theology, and was taught by Joseph Smith. It was clearly comprehended by the Prophet and his associates that intelligence is the vivifying force of all creation—animate or inanimate—that rock and tree and beast and man, have ascending degrees of intelligence. The intelligence there spoken of by the Prophet corresponds fully with the energy of science.

That the Prophet did not use the word current among scientific men at that time does not destroy the validity of this claim. Different words have no quarrel when they mean the same.

The Prophet also taught that this intelligence fills all space, and that it may appear in various forms, such as heat, light, and electricity, and that it is eternal, and can neither be created nor destroyed. These are the very qualities assigned to energy by scientific workers. This doctrine and its coincidence with the doctrine of science, appear marvelous, when it is recalled that the Prophet laid down these teachings in 1831, more than ten years before they were discovered by scientists, and a generation before they were generally accepted by the scientific world.

The Prophet did not stop with the enunciation of these two fundamental doctrines. He declared that a refined medium, called the Holy Spirit, fills all space, whereby intelligence is conveyed from place to place. In the terms of Joseph Smith, the forces of nature, such as heat, light and electricity, are simply various manifestations of the intelligence of the Holy Spirit; in the terms of science, of the energy of the universal ether. The parallelism is complete. The Holy Spirit, in "Mormon" theology, corresponds with the ether of science. This doctrine, too, was enunciated many years before the corresponding doctrines were established among men of science. The establishment of a system of theology which rests upon such perfectly scientific laws, of itself, if men would read with unprejudiced minds, would entitle Joseph Smith to a high position among the rational philosophers of earth.

THE INVARIABLE LAWS THAT GOVERN THE INDIVIDUAL.

On the basis of the fundamental laws, above defined, what does science require of its devotees? How does it affect the ac-

tions of the individual? As in theology, the scientific worker must have faith in the principles that have been discovered. It is not possible in one lifetime for a man to repeat all the work of preceding workers, to demonstrate the accuracy of their results. Much must be taken on trust; though at any time, should it be necessary, the earlier work may be repeated. Besides requiring faith in the principles discovered and enunciated by others, science demands that its every worker shall believe in things that lie far beyond the reach of man's senses.

The universal ether can neither be felt, seen, heard, smelled, nor tasted, yet the phenomena of nature compel us to accept its existence as indisputable fact. The science of chemistry is built upon the theory that all matter is composed of ultimate particles of matter called atoms. So small are these particles, that man shall not be able in this life, to bring them within the reach of any of the senses. Yet thousands of well established facts of chemistry tend to prove the existence of the atoms. In the faith of the scientist must be an absolute, unquestioning belief in realities that are represented to the human mind by the conception of atoms. The crystallographer, by a simple examination of a glass-like crystal, can state with certainty that the ultimate particles are built up in certain definite ways. These particles can never be seen by mortal man, yet no sane person, who studies the modern science of crystallography, fails to believe the correctness of the doctrines of the structure of crystals.

Many other illustrations might be quoted to show that science demands a faith in unseen, and, as far as direct action upon our senses goes, unknowable things. Such faith is indispensable to the worker who accepts the results of modern science. It is also to be remembered that without faith in the conception of science, it is quite impossible to make any scientific progress.

In theology, at least in the system established by Joseph Smith, a similiar faith is required of the individual. God and angels have been seen by very few individuals. These realities must be accepted by faith. In the words of the Prophet Joseph, "Faith is the assurance which men have of the existence of things which they have not seen, and the principle of action in all intelligent beings." With respect to the first principle of science and

theology, "Mormonism" is in entire accord with the best philosophy. The individual, whether scientist or theologian, must base his work on faith.

The scientist who has acquired faith in a law of nature will no longer transgress that law. He will obey it. If he establishes the faith that a wire connected in a certain way with the electric dynamo carries a current sufficiently strong to destroy life, he will not wantonly seize that wire in his hands. Before this faith came to him, he probably came near losing his life, by the careless handling of the charged wire. To conform to the laws of nature is scientific repentance. Faith in science or religion is a high form of intelligence and is opposed to ignorance. Repentance is the use of this intelligence for the benefit of man.

In "Mormonism" the second principle of action for the individual is repentance. If faith in God has been attained, and his laws have been made clear, the believer will no longer violate those laws; he will obey them. That is repentance. Not by a jot or tittle does this kind of repentance differ from the repentance taught by science. True, science does not *speak* of repentance, but it *thinks* it. In the matter of the great principle of repentance, governing the action of workers in science or theology, "Mormonism" is eminently sane and philosophical. Faith does not compel men to repent; but it is a necessary precedent. The man who does not repent in science or theology, after he has acquired faith, renders himself liable to injury and retards his own progress.

In the system of theology taught by Joseph Smith, baptism is the third great principle to be obeyed by the individual; that is, unless baptism follows faith and repentance, it is impossible to enter the kingdom of God. Many religious men, who can partly grasp the philosophical meaning of faith and repentance, fail to understand the necessity of baptism. To many, it is nothing more than an idle form which has no meaning. If, however, baptism is a true requisite for entrance into the Church of Christ, it must have its counterpart in all systems of true knowledge.

Suppose that man has attained faith in electricity. He then resolves to refrain from violating any of the laws of electricity. Suppose, further, that he desires to produce a current of electric-

ity. He winds wire around a piece of iron, and revolves it in the field of a magnet, and the current is produced. If the wire has not been wound in a certain definite manner, and has not been placed in the proper relation to the magnet, no current can be produced. The scientist may rail and object that it is all nonsense to insist that the work be done just so to produce the current. Nature is inexorable. The man to enter the kingdom of the electric current must yield obedience to the order of nature; he must receive a scientific baptism.

The chemist learns that the gas known as hydrogen is found in all acids, and may desire to obtain a supply of the gas. To do this he must bring the acid into contact with a suitable metal, such as zinc. The chemist may insist that he should get hydrogen by pouring the acid on wood. He soon finds that hydrogen may not be produced in that way. Inexorable nature again speaks up, "To enter the kingdom of hydrogen, the acid must be thrown on a metal." The chemist obeys; hydrogen is evolved; the chemist has been baptized.

The astronomer learns that a piece of glass ground according to the proper curvature will enable him to study the stars. The beginner says, "It is all nonsense to use a curved lens, I will use a piece of flat glass." He learns that nature never yields, and finally adopts the curved lens for his telescope. The young man has been baptized into the kingdom of the stars.

The baptism taught by the theology of Joseph Smith is nothing more than obedience to law. Just why it is necessary to be buried in the water to enter the Church, perhaps no man fully knows. Nor does any one know just *why* the wire must be wound, just so, to produce the current of electricity, or the acid brought upon a metal to yield hydrogen, or glass be ground to a certain curvature to bring the stars nearer the human vision. Of one thing every thinker may be certain, that the essential principle of baptism is as necessary in science as in theology. In this matter also, then, Joseph the Prophet is eminently philosophical.

The fourth principle in "Mormon" theology teaches that after baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost is conferred which enlightens the mind, clears the intelligence, and brings man nearer the presence of God. So also in science, to the man who obeys the laws

of nature, come greater power and intelligence, to him who winds the wire right, the electric current comes, with all its latent powers. To the chemist who throws acid on the metal, hydrogen is yielded, with which many wonders may be performed. To him who gazes into the heavens through a properly ground lens, many of the mysteries of space are revealed. Thus is the Holy Ghost conferred in science; and thus, also, in a more subtle and greater degree is it conferred in the Church. The dogma of Joseph Smith and the teachings of science harmonize perfectly in the examination of the fourth fundamental principle of the philosophy governing the individual.

So, one by one, the great principles of "Mormon" theology may be shown to have a scientific, philosophical counterpart. It is a matter of great note that the philosophy of Joseph Smith compares so closely with the philosophy of nature. It is even more notable that the "Mormon" prophet taught these things as absolute truth long before science had proclaimed many of them invariably correct.

THE UNIFYING LAW OF LIFE.

Without examining further the numerous principles of "Mormon" theology, let us investigate the law, under the influence of which the whole of creation moves, first according to science, and, secondly, according to "Mormonism."

It is becoming fairly well demonstrated that the ceaseless changes and transformations in nature cause a greater and greater complexity in nature. This in other words means that the earth and all on it are developing and progressing. According to Darwin and his followers, man and animals advance. Only those who prosper persist; those who retard, die. Creation as a whole grows and develops, and must of necessity do so. By this law, the purpose of the earth and the universe is explained to be endless growth. The law of evolution is the great cementing law of science. Even so, in the philosophy of Joseph Smith, the doctrine is taught that all things advance; that man shall continue to advance, in intelligence, and all pertaining to it, until he shall become as God is now. Meanwhile, our God will also increase in his fulness, and ever be a God to us. Through this doctrine, all

the principles of the Gospel are made coherent. All the requirements of man have in view his eternal growth. Darwin suggested, and his followers have taught, that one class of creation, by the law of evolution, can pass into another class. No proof has been found for this teaching. Joseph Smith taught that every class of creation is subject to eternal progression within the sphere in which it has been placed. This is a rational view of evolution, and a view to which biologists are rapidly coming.

Joseph Smith taught the law of evolution as an eternal truth, twenty or more years before Darwin published his views. It is certainly remarkable that the "Mormon" Prophet should enunciate so clearly, in advance of science, the law of laws, which explains the destiny of man, and all pertaining to him. "Mormon" and scientific philosophy are thus identical, with respect to the great, governing, universal law.

Joseph Smith is here also seen to be a sane philosopher, in full accord with the best that recent years have brought.

THE FORCE OF FORCES.

Above the law of laws is the force of forces—or the central force of the universe. Science has little to say of God. It is content to accept the laws of nature as they are found. Yet, at times, in some branches of science, a knowledge of the beginning of things is desired. Usually science answers, "I do not know;" but it nevertheless affirms that there must be a central force, unknown and unnamed, to which the manifestations of all other forces may be referred. Science, which is essentially orderly, is chaotic when the question of the beginning of things is raised. The "Mormon" Prophet left no such weakness in his philosophy. He, too, realized the necessity of a controlling universal force. This he named God. God is an organized, material being, filled with the form of energy known as intelligence. "The glory of God is intelligence." All other forces of nature may be converted into intelligence; and from intelligence all other forces may be obtained; God is the center of these forces, and their directing power. Because of this centralization, nature is orderly. Natural laws are not, as supposed by some philosophers, accidental relations of phenomena, observed and recorded by man. The force of intelligence

controls all phenomena; there is mind behind the operations of nature. God, himself a part of nature, is not the creator of nature, but the organizer and director of it. What a beautifully reasonable climax that is to the wonderful philosophy of Joseph the Prophet!

The intelligence of God is organized; therein lies his individuality and life. Man is organized intelligence; therein lies his life. Through obedience to law, intelligence grows; by the violation of law, which is sin, it decays. It is the degree of organized intelligence that ultimately distinguishes one man from other men; men from beasts, beasts from plants, and plants from rocks. Since intelligence, as defined by Joseph Smith, corresponds with the main form of energy of the universe, the doctrine of God, and all other beings, and of life, finds expression in terms of energy. That is exactly what science demands.*

Is it any wonder that workers in science, who have been taught the doctrine of an immaterial God who is able to create something from nothing, and to transcend all laws of nature, depart from the faith of their childhood? Truth is truth forever. Scientific truth cannot be theological lie. To the sane mind, theology and philosophy must harmonize. They have the common ground of truth on which to meet.

Thus, on every hand, from the highest to the lowest, from the force of forces and the law of laws to the fundamental laws governing the operations of the universe, and the actions of the individual, the philosophy of the "Mormon" Prophet is consistently referred back to matter, energy, and law. In its completeness, it transcends the philosophy of science. Wherever the doctrines of "Mormonism" and science meet, they agree. No discord has yet been found between them. Science is daily confirming the truth of the universe—embracing philosophy of the unlearned founder of "Mormonism."

*This article is but a glimpse of the subject. It would be absurd to attempt to outline the whole of the philosophy of Joseph Smith in a space allowed for this article. Even the fundamental doctrines here considered have been but faintly sketched; yet to him who thinks, it will be a solemn testimony that the maligned Mormon Prophet founded his philosophy upon principles that now, one hundred years after his birth, lie at the foundation of all secure human philosophy.—*J. A. W.*

Back of the revelations of the greatness of the Prophet's knowledge that come to all who enter upon such a discussion, stands the eminent fact that "Mormon" philosophy is plain, simple, and easily understood. There is no need and no room for mysteries in the teachings of Joseph the Prophet. Similarly, the philosophy of men, based upon nature, is essentially simple, and easily understood. Only untruth needs to hide itself in mysteries.

One hundred years have passed since Joseph, honored and chosen of God, entered the school of life. Face to face with God, he learned the Gospel, planned before the foundations of the world were laid, and he taught it to a careless world. It is not Joseph Smith's philosophy; but God's code of fundamental laws, which the world is laboriously deciphering in the beautifully written pages of nature. Is it any wonder that the philosophy is perfect?

Divine joy transfigured the spirit of Joseph, as the revelations of God came upon him. The essence of all that he learned, he has left for us. We, too, may feel the stately tread of God through the measureless ages of time, if we ponder upon the fulness of the meaning of the Gospel. It is our duty to do it.

In this year of jubilee, the centenary of the Prophet's birth, may the visions of Joseph come upon the people, to make them strong! May the simple philosophy of God's words be understood by all the seekers!

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