

Logos

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The Greek word λόγος or *logos* is a word with various meanings. It is often translated into English as "Word" but can also mean thought, speech, meaning, reason, proportion, principle, standard, or logic, among other things. It has varied use in the fields of philosophy, analytical psychology, rhetoric and religion.

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Use in ancient philosophy

One must not follow what is common; but, even though the Logos is common, most people live as though they possessed their own understanding of it. (Fr.2) The common is what is open to all, what can be seen and heard by all. To see is to let in with open eyes what is open to view, i.e. what is lit up and revealed to all. The dead (the completely private ones) neither see nor hear; they are not closed. No light (fire) shines in them; no speech sounds in them. And yet, even they participate in the cosmos. The extinguished ones also belong to the continuum of lighting and extinguishing that is the common cosmos. The dead touch upon the living sleeping, who in turn touch upon the living waking. (Fr. 26)

Heraclitus also used Logos to mean the undifferentiated material substrate from which all things came: "Listening not to me but to the Logos it is wise to agree that all [things] are *one*." In this sense Logos is Heraclitus' answer to the Pre-Socratic question of what the arche is of all things. Logos therefore designates both the material substrate itself and the universal, mechanical, "just" way in which this substrate manifests itself in and as individual things; that is, it subsumes within itself the later Platonic distinction (in *Timaeus*) between "form" and "matter".

By the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, *logos* was the term used to describe the faculty of human reason and the knowledge men had of the world and of each other. Plato allowed his characters to engage in the conceit of describing *logos* as a living being in some of his dialogues. The development of the Academy with hypomnemata brought *logos* closer to the literal text. Aristotle, who studied under Plato, first developed the concept of logic as a depiction of the rules of human rationality.

The Stoics understood Logos as the animating power of the universe.

Logos is also derived from the Greek word "caverna."

Use in rhetoric

In rhetoric, *logos* is one of the three modes of persuasion (the other two are pathos, emotional appeal; and ethos, the qualification of the speaker or distinguished character sentiment or morality). Logos refers to logical appeal, and in fact the term *logic* derives from it. Logos normally implies numbers, polls, and other mathematical or scientific data.

Logos has many advantages:

- Data is hard to manipulate, meaning that it is harder to argue against a logos argument.
- For the same reason, it may sway cynical listeners to the speaker's opinion.
- Logos enhances ethos by making the speaker look prepared and knowledgeable to the audience.

Use in Christianity

See also: Jesus Christ the Logos

In Christianity, the prologue of the Gospel of John calls Jesus "the Logos" (usually translated as "the Word" in English bibles such as the KJV) and played a central role in establishing the doctrine of Jesus' divinity and the Trinity. (See Christology.) The opening verse reads: "In the beginning was the *Logos*, and the *Logos* was with God, and the *Logos* was God."

Some scholars of the Bible have suggested that John made creative use of double meaning in the word "Logos" to communicate to both Jews, who were familiar with the Wisdom tradition in Judaism, and Hellenic polytheism, especially followers of Philo. Each of these two groups had its own history associated with the concept of the Logos, and each could understand John's use of the term from one or both of those contexts. Especially for the Hellenists, however, John turns the concept of the Logos on its head when he claimed "the *Logos* became flesh and dwelt among us" (v. 14). Similarly, some translations of the Gospel of John into Chinese have used the word "Tao (道)" to translate the "Logos" in a provocative way.

Gordon Clark famously translated *Logos* as "Logic" in the opening verses of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Logic, and the Logic was with God and the Logic was God." He meant to imply by this translation that the laws of logic were contained in the Bible itself and were therefore not a secular principle imposed on the Christian worldview.

On April 1, 2005, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (who would become Pope Benedict XVI just over two weeks later) referred to the Christian religion as the religion of the *Logos*:

Christianity must always remember that it is the religion of the "Logos." It is faith in the "Creator Spiritus," in the Creator Spirit, from which proceeds everything that exists. Today, this should be precisely its philosophical strength, in so far as the problem is whether the world comes from the irrational, and reason is not, therefore, other than a "sub-product," on occasion even harmful of its development or whether the world

comes from reason, and is, as a consequence, its criterion and goal. The Christian faith inclines toward this second thesis, thus having, from the purely philosophical point of view, really good cards to play, despite the fact that many today consider only the first thesis as the only modern and rational one par excellence. However, a reason that springs from the irrational, and that is, in the final analysis, itself irrational, does not constitute a solution for our problems. Only creative reason, which in the crucified God is manifested as love, can really show us the way. In the so necessary dialogue between secularists and Catholics, we Christians must be very careful to remain faithful to this fundamental line: to live a faith that comes from the "Logos," from creative reason, and that, because of this, is also open to all that is truly rational.^[1]

Similar concepts

Within Eastern religions there are ideas with varying degrees of similarity to the philosophical and Christian uses. Five concepts with some parallels to *Logos* are Tao, the Vedic notion of rta, the Hindu and Buddhist conception of dharma, Aum (from Hindu cosmology), and the Egyptian Maat. These are all iconic terms of various cultures that have the meaning that Logos has: the order and orderliness of the world, and, at the same time, the material source of the world.

In New Age mysticism, the Odic force is sometimes described as "the physical manifestation of the creative Logos."

In ancient Egyptian mythology, Hu was the deification of the word spoken to create existence. Ma'at was the concept, and goddess, of divine order.

In Surat Shabda Yoga, Shabda is considered to be analogous to the Logos as representative of the supreme being in Christianity.

Logos as it is also presently understood today in Theosophical terms and by the Rosicrucians (in their conception of the cosmos) which further influenced how this word was understood later on (in 20th century psychology, for instance).

See also

- Rhema
- Spirituality
- Nous
- Parmenides
- Christianity
- Sophia
- -logy

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Notes

1. ^ Cardinal Ratzinger on Europe's crisis of culture, retrieved from <http://www.catholiceducation.org/articles/politics/pg0143.html>

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