Topic: The problem with studying philosophy is ...

The problem with studying philosophy is "It is like a blind man looking for a black cat in a dark room where there is no cat". This is the view i have heard many a person take, although i myself prefer the subtle approach that states "the problem with studying philosophy is that it is like an old woman looking for her sowing needle under the street light, when she lost it in her house".

Philosophy[1] it seems to me is about giving *reasons* for your beliefs/views. The implicit assumption made in that statement is that the person talking (or listening) is a rational person. However i think it is high time we *woke* up to ourselves and realised that we are *not* rational animals but rather rationalising ones. For example, take a solipsist, now he can believe virtually anything he likes and there are no *reasons* you can give him to make him believe anything other than what he wants to believe. Any reasons you might give him might be nothing more than "just another part of his dream". In this sense, we all do the same, we all rationalise what we come across to suit our beliefs.

A point to note is that rationality is very much an attribute of the intellect just like emotions are the attribute of the heart[2]. And since philosophy is so preoccupied with rationality, we tend to intellectualise everything too much and hence we become *blind* to the love and truth flowing out of our hearts. We have killed our intuitions due to the abuse of our intellects! The woman is looking for the needle under the street light because she can see better there, just like we look for truths through our intellect just because we have (since a very young age) become accustomed to it and know it better than our hearts! Little do we realise that we are just wasting our time! What we need to do is open the windows of our house and let the light in so that we might find the needle. That is, we should use our intellects (within its limitations - realising its limitation) to illumine our paths but it is our hearts that must walk upon the path or we can never 'progress'.

Another problem with philosophising (rationalising) is a judgemental attitude. Say for example i was doing subject X. Now if i were to write an essay without giving much evidence for supporting what i was claiming, i know i would get a fail in that subject. That is, the mark on that essay would indicate how easily the marker could *rationalise* the piece of work to conform to their set of beliefs. The lower the mark, the harder the marker had to work to make the essay conform to their beliefs. This is another major problem with studying philosophy (at least in university); you are judged by not what you have learned but rather by how much the teacher could impose his/her modem of *rationality* on you.

Do you really want to know the truth - well you're going to have to learn to paint with all the "Colors of the Wind".[3]

As a contrast to studying philosophy at the university level (or at least most of the subjects at university level) we have the "Tao Te Ching" (Lao Tzu). I believe it is very inspirational and in being inspirational, it achieves its purpose. Perhaps many western philosophers would not like to call it a philosophical piece of work (they would rather call it poetry), but at least to me, it is a philosophical piece of work that transcends philosophy itself - it truly is a philosophical piece of work indeed!

Perhaps i ask too much of philosophers (eg. to be able to transcend even rationality when need be), perhaps what i seek is more in the realms of the mystics, but then again the mystics are perhaps the only people i would cal true philosophers, the rest i believe are too caught up playing games of rationality and argumentation.
Perhaps the problem with studying philosophy is - "*studying it*".

Perhaps the things i see
are only visible to a blind such as me.

Notes

1. In this essay when i refer to philosophy i shall be referring to "philosophy as taught in universities" (unless otherwise stated). This is because i have seen people 'philosophise' in such different 'manners' that it would be unfair to 'absolutely' generalise about philosophy.
2. By the '*heart*' i don't simply mean merely something from which emotions are assumed to originate, but rather also an entity that is intuitive etc. I fear i cannot give a much better description than that (even though i find it very very inadequate) because the heart speaks the language of love not english!
3. "Colors of the Wind" is a song from the Walt Disney movie/soundtrack "Pocahontas".

I am adding this part in later (about 20 - 30 days after i wrote the above essay - but i feel that the following could be of interest anyway!!!)

The only truths that exist are by definition true, and likewise the only untruths that exist are by definition false. For example, take the statement "Everybody wants to be happy", now if someone comes and say - "but i want to be sad" then you might say "ah, but you only want to be sad *because* that makes you happy!". We can see that we *define* happiness to be *desirable* by everyone and hence we claim that what you might ultimately want is happiness! We can see that claims such as "Everyone wants to be happy" are *meaningless* in the sense that they do not give us any information, that is - they are just like tautologies.

Similarly, i believe that when we discuss matters of God (or anything for that matter), if all we are trying to do is *prove/disprove* the existence of God then we will fail drastically, because as stated above, all our *truths/untruths* are by *definition* true/untrue! One might ask, but how about St. Anselm's proof for the existence of God? Well, firstly, as i understand it, St. Anselm never meant to propose his idea as a proof, he only said what he said in his prayers but others took it as being a proof, and in doing so, they took out the *real* inspirational value and proposed it as a proof.

One might say, but everything cannot be *defined* for example, the word "game" cannot be defined but everyone knows what it means, similarly the word "perfect" (as used in St. Anselm's prayer) might not be able to be defined, but we know what it means and hence can say that his argument is either good or bad etc. I would say, sure enough, most words are hard to define precisely, and that is why St. Anselm's argument is rejected by some. Some claim that to be "perfect" does not necessarily mean to exist, but this is only *their* definition of perfect. As said above, most words are hard to define, nevertheless we have our own concepts (or general ideas / definitions) of what sort of things the word can mean, and this differs from person to person, and hence the disagreements - still due to definition (be it undefinable (precisely) by the user or the word)!

Alternately we sometimes use language to read our histories or plan for the future. This is also (as i see it) unhealthy, because when we try to relive the past or plan for the future, we miss out on the *eternal* now! We miss out on *the bliss of the moment / the eternity of the moment*.

Relating it back to 'studying philosophy', well like i said above, since true things are by *definition* true and false things are by *definition* false, it is worthless talking about them. The only *use* of language as i see it is if we use it in an *inspirational* manner (like the mystics sometimes do or like we sometimes to in a prayer), to ignite a flame in our hearts so that we may *understand* that which is beyond words.