

As much as I love philosophy I have never understood much of it. Not only was the writing confusing and obscenely verbose; most of the concepts presented in many texts seemed as satirical as a Vonnegut novel. My reflection during this paper's writing commissioned me to quest for what philosophy meant to me, and how it helped me live and understand life better. In my findings, most philosophers were wrong, many were close, and I felt I was just getting started.

Philosophy, or Philo Sophia, classically means "The Love of Wisdom". Taking a closer look at the meaning of philosophy, I am curious as to its implications. Does this love imply the love of searching for wisdom, or the hoarding of it? With a trusting heart, I would hope that it implies the former, as the later brings thoughts of tyranny, and sophistry; something the Greek originators of the word fought against. So the search begins, equipping prior philosophical texts, doubt, creativity, and an array of logical methods.

While learning more about past philosophers, I feel that two things get in the way of most philosophical pursuits: logic, and discourse, whether written or spoken. It is hard not believe in an 'Objective Truth', but equally just as difficult to believe that Truth is so minute that one man, within the context of a life-time and a few books could seek to strip that Truth of its obfuscation. Logic and its associates create reflective distance, a Sartrian nothingness, between us and the Truth we seek, while only capturing small aspects of a much larger picture. Spoken and written words create cultural barriers, and misunderstandings when relating words to their precise meanings through linguistic translation. The lives we live, and the decisions we make, furthering to better ourselves

through the pursuit of wisdom is philosophy. We pay homage to philosophy by loving, living, and learning from life.

Jean Paul Sartre provided me with an interesting insight while studying his book 'Being and Nothingness'. I had always been interested in how I could know more about me, and Sartre was there to offer a helping if not strangely complex hand. When I say the insights garnered from Sartre's work were interesting, that is not to say that they were pleasant in acceptance. To make short a five hundred-plus page text, Sartre informed me that I couldn't know myself, at least through the means by which I originally thought I could: self-reflection.

Reflection creates a gap, an abstract distance, and coined 'nothingness', between the reflector and the reflected upon. The reflected upon, becomes something of an object to the reflector, robbing the reflected upon of any qualities allowing change or revision. This, of course, would become a problem when reflecting on ourselves, those persons we like to consider, or at least hope, are constantly changing. Philosophy, much like us, needs to be dynamic, and constantly changing, for without this essential quality an end is near, and a Truth found: ultimately ending the journey, the love of learning and wisdom.

The above paragraph attempted to rob philosophers of one their most coveted tools, but without regret, we shall continue and attempt to rob them of another, that of communication. Words, both written and spoken, can be the cause of many problems throughout everyday life. The word 'nigger', when typed and now being read, strikes a cord of discomfort in most of us, and has most likely been removed from our personal dictionaries of words that can be spoken within the company of others. This is a very simple example of how words can go from a single person derogatory context, to

becoming a term that crosses cultural barriers, affecting many more than just a single individual. The same can be said about philosophy.

It is not new to anyone who has read even a small portion of a philosophical text that philosophers seem to communicate slightly different than the rest of the lay population reading the text. This is not without good reason, for most of the concepts presented in many of those texts have no names, so new ones must be created. Or new words are created to describe familiar concepts that would normally take up a few pages to express. This could be looked at as a sort of linguistic abstraction. But it is that very sort of abstraction that lends the concepts in the text difficult to communicate. In the words of Richard Rorty, "In this conception, 'philosophy' is not a name for a discipline which confronts permanent issues, and unfortunately keeps restating them, or attacking them with clumsy dialectic instruments" (264). Words like Monad, Being, Process, Nothingness, Consciousness; even familiar words like Reality, Virtue, Knowledge, Truth carry different meaning among different circles of philosophers depending on the context of their conversation. To the layperson these familiar terms carry a generally accepted, often Webster's or Oxford dictated, meaning with them. Whether correct or not, these familiar terms are understood, in at least small meaning, by the majority.

Much can be said about the misunderstanding of philosophical texts due to language use, but even more can be said about general discourse between individuals from different cultures, that speak different languages. After taking four years of French, I can remember how to partially conjugate a verb, but for the life of me cannot recall how to greet someone. I find it hard to understand, though largely due to my own linguistic ineptitude, how I am supposed to communicate the concepts of 'higher matters' when I

cannot even carry on a normal discourse with the individual I am speaking with. Now, mind you, this is a rather simple example, for I could just hire myself a translator and the problem is solved. Or is it? Now, not only do I have a linguistic barrier between myself and the person I am communicating with, I have added another layer of abstraction, the translator, which may mistranslate my words from a lack of understanding the concepts I am trying to communicate.

So what is a philosopher to do without reason and discourse? The philosopher should live philosophy. Live the love of wisdom by pursuing it each and every moment of existence. To follow this up with a practical example, I had returned to college after a five-year absence, what I then thought was wasted on the real world. After my first degree, and an academic burnout, I had replaced school for the conformity and bureaucracy of the corporate world. Though I put down my escape into the 'real world', not all of my experiences were negative. I learned a lot about how most are expected to act within a corporate environment. I learned about what it takes to run a business, to love a woman, and most importantly what I thought was wrong with much of how the world operated, and what not to do when presented with certain opportunities again. Sure I can learn much from the professors and studies of a higher education, but this education pales in comparison to what was learned when I was out of school, and still learning, but learning differently.

This analogy can be carried over into living philosophy as opposed to reason, or merely talking about philosophy and Truth. Much like the academic world, reason and philosophical discourse, a superficial and pale in comparison to a life where Truth is learned through trial and error, love and loss, wealth and poverty. I want to experience

philosophy: bask in the glory of the Platonic Forms, touch and taste Leibniz's Monads, not read or write about them.

Of course there are many problems when trying to postulate such a way of life as a philosophical study. Many questions can be raised on the qualifications of living philosophically versus living some other way, or in matters of ethics. Then of course there is the issue of communication. When we do not speak of philosophical higher matters to one another, how do we communicate what we have now come to understand through life's experiences? Sartre provides an interesting insight to this. He states in reference to freedom and action that, "The essential consequence of our earlier remarks is that man being condemned to be free carries the weight of the whole world on his shoulders; he is responsible for the world and for himself as a way of being" (Sartre, 529). Sartre is speaking about the effects; those that we are and are not aware of, our actions have on others, and in turn the world around us. Our actions, as we live through our philosophical journeys, are the main mode of communication between what we know, and what other's want to learn.

We shall now return to reason, as tool for reflecting on our actions, where I believe it offers more benefits. I have failed a lot in my life and, it seems, haven't learned much from those failures, because I continue to make mistakes that could be said to be the same kind of mistakes I made in the past. This is the most difficult aspect of what I am proposing, for a multitude of reasons. Superficially, it is very difficult for many of us to admit to being wrong, or to have failed, for we view failure as a negative thing. Also as I stated earlier, to reflect upon these past actions creates abstract distance between your reflective mind and the past action, hence you do not get the whole picture

and are potentially missing an integral part of what made your past action a failure. But, nonetheless, we must again ask reflection for its assistance in helping us learn from our mistakes, and make better future judgments when confronted with a similar situation.

\*\*\* Ending Quote \*\*\*

William James: “A pragmatist turns his back resolutely and once for all upon a lot of unwholesome habits dear to professional philosophers. He turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretending absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action and towards power.” (23)

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# Got The Life

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