

# doing philosophy in the philippines

towards a more responsive  
philosophy for the 21<sup>st</sup> century<sup>1</sup>

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Thank you for not asking, again, whether or not there is such a thing as a Filipino philosophy. In any case, had the question been asked, I would have to answer it in the affirmative since if, as Kant assures us, there is such a thing as a natural metaphysics, then we must, as humans, have already been philosophizing, as the tired cliché goes, since time immemorial. If, by the question, however, people mean academic philosophy, then all we need to do is look around this hall and ask if it is not the case that the majority of us, if not all of us are, in fact, either teachers or students of philosophy in one or the other school in the country. No doubt, there is academic or professional philosophy in the Philippines, backed up yet by some publications, both books and journal articles, which cannot be mistaken for anything other than philosophy, and so I propose that we already happily lay to rest the question as to whether or not there is Filipino philosophy, natural or academic. The question thus left to us is only this: *How do we do philosophy in the Philippines?* The answer to this question constitutes also our opinion on the state of Filipino philosophy today, never mind if you find it globally competitive or not.

At a formal discussion with the student majors of UST on this same subject sometime last month, I was able to sort of substantiate this position by actually naming

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names. Suppose, I said, we identify one who could very well be to us like Socrates is to Western philosophy and Confucius is to Eastern philosophy, and suppose we agree to name that philosopher as Emerita S. Quito, the author of the first-ever De La Salle *Festschrift*, *A Life of Philosophy*, such a supposition would then make us identify the other Filipino philosophers, either *pre-Quito* or *post-Quito*, as in fact suggested by the students I was conversing with. Pre-Quito would be Angel de Blas and Ariston Estrada of UST, Ricardo Pascual of UP and Benito Reyes of FEU. Quito's contemporaries would include Roque Ferriols and Ramon Reyes of Ateneo, Antonio Piñon and Pedro Gabriel of UST, Armando Bonifacio of UP, Quintin Terrenal of USC- Cebu and Salvador Gonzalez and Claro Ceniza of DLSU. Post-Quito would be all her students in the graduate school of UST, among whom would come easily to mind Alfredo Co, Leonardo Mercado, Florentino Timbreza, Amable Tuibeo and myself; at the Ateneo one would count Leovino Garcia, Manuel Dy, Tomas Rosario and Ranier Ibanea; in UP there would be Zosimo Lee, at St. Louis University in Baguio Julius Bautista and at the University of San Carlos in Cebu Leonardo Estioko. There is a second generation of post-Quito philosophers, the ones currently most active in writing and administration, such as Paolo Bolaños of UST, Agustin Martin Rodriguez of Ateneo, Ryan Urbano of the University of San Carlos, Ryan Maboloc of Ateneo de Davao, Jeffrey Ocay of Silliman University, Napoleon Mabaquiao of DLSU, etc. . . etc. . . I'm sure I shall not be able to name everybody's name. All that I mean to show is how far academic philosophy has already gone in our country, and that it is idle still to ask whether there is such a thing.

Now, however, let us do what Kant describes as the hardest task of all, namely, self-knowledge. Let us examine how exactly we are doing philosophy. To begin with, I owe you a *mea culpa*, for many years ago I classified Filipino philosophy, I think following Quito herself, into expository, anthropological and progressive, with the majority of us falling under expository philosophy. That gave most of us the impression that we were lacking in originality, especially considering that we were all coming from Quito and company who had just introduced us to phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics and analytic philosophy, as well as Indian and Chinese philosophies, not to mention structuralism, semiotics, critical theory, process philosophy and others. The ones that felt some amount of originality, rightly or wrongly, were those using the anthropological approach, seemingly not noticing their own admission of their use of phenomenology and linguistic analysis, not to mention that anthropology itself is a Western discipline not too long ago evolved from the social sciences. For some strange reason, too, the classical and ideological Marxists felt themselves genuinely Filipino, unlike the supposed colonial-minded descriptive scholars (like ourselves) who were simply mouthing Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Whitehead, Foucault and Derrida, and so on.

Perhaps to assuage a guilty conscience, the younger generation of post-Quito students started to do what sometimes they would call applied philosophy, feeling a measure of relevance and originality only if they added to their studies something related to Philippine politics or government, or Philippine education or society, or the Filipino family and the church, or some large issues affecting the Philippines and the world at the moment. I must admit that the early attempts at this so-called applied philosophy seemed to me superficial and contrived, ever tending to dilute what was genuinely philosophical in its material. (There were, of course, some rare successes, such as the work of Ruby Suazo on Ricoeur and the Filipino family.) Happily, this effort at relevance seemed to have borne some fruit because we notice some degree of maturity in recent attempts, such as one on Simone de Beauvoir which a graduate student is trying to use as a basis for a critique of the Philippine Magna Carta for Women and another on Kant which an undergraduate major presented as a key to peace in Mindanao – both works were defended before the close of the last semester in two different institutions. On the whole, however, such so-called applied philosophy continues to weaken the philosophical component of our collective work and thus diminishes our global competence in the discipline.

Still, there are at least two things happening already in the academe. First, we see that the endeavor of Quito to offer a wide variety of philosophies to our students has thus far succeeded. Although it can, to some extent, be questioned how well we are actually doing the courses in the classroom, the curriculum for philosophy majors anywhere in the country, including the seminaries, is complete with both historical and systematic courses, plus a selection of electives from both Eastern and Western traditions, admittedly more Western than Eastern and, it seems to me, inclined towards the contemporary, even postmodern thought. In that sense, we are not behind the times. It reminds me of my then provincial superior, now superior general of my congregation, Fr. Heinz Kulüke, himself a competent philosopher, who, not too long ago, after one of his trips to Europe, confided to me how discussions in Europe were the same discussions we were already doing in the Philippines.

There's then no reason to be shy about what we're doing in our schools, as far as scope goes. What we obviously need is hard discipline and rigor because even if we have the breadth, if we do not have the required depth, we will simply be meandering lightly over the surface without penetrating its substance; we will be, as they say, spreading ourselves thin. That's what actually happens when, for instance, we try to spice up Marx's concept of alienation with what we, pardon the adverb, lazily call a "critical analysis" of, say, our local parish pastoral programs, all in the name of relevance. And that's the second thing that's actually happening here. We often fail to measure up to the demands of our primary sources, such as, in this case of our example, Marx's *Das Kapital*. These last three semesters that I've been teaching in Manila, I've been asked to do Kant, Heidegger and Gadamer in the graduate school, always devoting the entire term to only the main

works; thus, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger's *Being and Time* and Gadamer's *Truth and Method*; not once have I succeeded to cover the complete volume. I mention this just to impress on you how much is required to understand a full text, which is why it often happens that adding an item of relevance, even if current and important, could appear like a sheer excuse from the hard work of mastering a philosopher, exactly what is needed if we aim to boast of surpassing the text and acquiring originality.

You, of course, know what I mean. Whatever is your discipline, you must start with apprenticeship. Even the prodigious Michaelangelo had to enlist himself as a trainee in the workshop of the renowned painting experts Domenico and Davide Ghirlandaio. The situation is even more steep in the case of philosophy where one has to deal historically with texts whose neglect could be "a dangerous thing," as the poet says.<sup>2</sup> If at all, everybody needs to do exploratory or descriptive philosophy, an enormous amount of it, before one can qualify as an original thinker in his own right. Deficiency in this tends to develop what Gadamer would call the wrong prejudices, which could do incalculable, albeit unconscious, damage to our ability to understand.<sup>3</sup>

Quito has taught us to acquire a broad mind for what Confucius calls "great learning."<sup>4</sup> And, like Confucius, she knew this to be the way of the humanities and not

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<sup>2</sup> "A little Learning is a dang'rous Thing;/ Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian Spring;/ There shallow Draughts intoxicate the Brain,/ And drinking largely sobers us again." Alexander Pope, "An Essay on Criticism."

<sup>3</sup> Gadamer is, of course, consciously coming from Martin Heidegger who, in *Being and Time*, "talks about making our scientific theme 'secure' by deriving our fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception from the things themselves." (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [Continuum, New York, 1998], 269). "If we want to do justice to man's finite, historical mode of being, it is necessary to fundamentally rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and acknowledge the fact that there are legitimate prejudices." (277) What we should guard against, says Gadamer, are the illegitimate, false or incorrect prejudices because "the great achievements in the human sciences almost never become outdated." (284)

<sup>4</sup> The *Great Learning* is one of the four Confucian classics besides the *Analects*, *Mencius* and *Doctrine of the Mean*. The *Great Learning* says, in part, "Those who wished to cultivate their personal lives would first rectify their minds. Those who wished to rectify their minds would first make their wills sincere. Those who wished to make their wills sincere would first extend their knowledge. The extension of knowledge consists in the investigation of things." ("The Great Learning," in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Wing-Tsit Chan [Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1963], 86) The narrow mind does not make a "superior man"; it makes a "petty man." Again and again, Quito tells us that "there is no philosophical system that is completely wrong, hence to be summarily condemned, nor is there one that is completely right and therefore to be totally accepted." Open-mindedness, she avers, means

necessarily the way of one who is trying hard to be original, much less one whose ambition is to write a *magnum opus*. Personally, I can resonate with Confucius who considers himself a humble teacher, a transmitter rather than an originator.<sup>5</sup> That, you would say, is, so far as Confucius is concerned, the supreme understatement of the day. The paradox is that originality is not something that can be forced from anyone, nor something one can cheat one's way around with. One has to go through the entire length of what Hegel calls the "phenomenology of the spirit" in order to catch a glimpse of its revelation.<sup>6</sup> The Good is the proverbial light at the end of Plato's journey to the Upperworld, what humanists call *Bildung*. We have to teach our students diligence so that, when their turn comes to take our place, they shall know how to guide their sheep. Only by a continuous transmission of excellence and diligence can we eventually come to full maturity, perfectly confident of ourselves as a philosophical nation.

If I claim that Quito is still today's Filipino philosopher to beat, it is not because she has bequeathed to us a school of thought beyond surpassing, nor because she has founded a philosophy that calls for discipleship. Her work remains unsurpassed, precisely because none of us has yet surpassed her diligence. In her own time she would semestrally introduce something new to us, when no one else would be discussing it elsewhere. It was she who gave us Renaissance philosophy and, before that, Plotinus and neo-Platonism. She did Karl Marx as well as Herbert Marcuse, while students were marching on the streets and even occupying universities abroad. She demanded no personal allegiance from us while subtly moving us in our own self-directed paths. She asked us, rather, to be faithful to our personal light, wherever it would lead us. When, finally, she stopped writing, she perhaps had nothing more to say; perhaps, she already felt having said everything as allowed by her powers. That probably seemed for her the end of philosophy, at least as far as she was concerned.

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"the willingness to listen and to grant to the other side the widest possible benevolence of interpretation. To condemn a contrary view outright is bigotry and dogmatism; it renders intellectual growth impossible." (Emerita Quito, "A New Concept of Philosophy," in *A Life of Philosophy: Festschrift in Honor of Emerita S. Quito*, [Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1990], 8).

<sup>5</sup> "I transmit but I do not create; I am sincerely fond of the ancient." (*The Sayings of Confucius*, VII, 1, trans. James R. Ware [New York: A New American Library Mentor Book, 1955], 50).

<sup>6</sup> "It is this process by which science in general comes about, this gradual development of knowing, that is set forth here in the *Phenomenology of Mind*. . . . To reach the stage of genuine knowledge, or produce the element where science is found – the pure conception of science itself – a long and laborious journey must be undertaken." G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J.B. Baillie (New York: Harper & Row Torchbooks, 1967), 88.

And what has been our response? Leonardo Mercado, as far as I know, continues to be the main voice for the anthropological approach to Filipino philosophy, mainly on the basis of his fortunately titled book, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*.<sup>7</sup> Fortunately, because, besides being decently written originally as a Ph.D. dissertation, it is the first book with 'Filipino Philosophy' in the title, and so there is no reason why it should not be taken, even if perhaps not completely accurately, as also the first book on the subject. The book, however, is not free from flaws, as attested to by ensuing reviews, principally because of its relatively thin documentation, still too small for a work of anthropology. Perhaps it would have been better had anthropologists themselves written the book, except that our Filipino anthropologists might have been busy doing other things, refusing to see that outstanding anthropologists like Claude Levi-Strauss and Marcel Mauss could in fact be taken quite seriously by and exert vast influence on many philosophers.

That Mercado's *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* continues to occupy the high ground in its own genre is thanks to the fact that others who use the same method have thus far failed to improve on his work. Always mentioned in this connection is Florentino Timbreza who, however, has other diversions which disable him from giving his anthropological bent the fullest concentration and focus it deserves. Both Mercado and Timbreza have linguistic interests that, if only they apply to comparative studies, the former between Tagalog and his native Waray or Cebuano and the latter between Tagalog and his native Ilocano—if only they did comparative studies with the sure and rigorous hand of experts, they would have achieved something truly remarkable for Filipino philosophy.

Quito, in fact, was ahead of both Mercado and Timbreza in the use of the anthropological method. A satisfactory and exemplary, albeit small, work using this method is Quito's "A Filipino Volksggeist in Vernacular Literature" which wisely focuses on Pampango vernacular literature and thus keeps the author's attitude appropriately modest. In this "brief survey of the major works of vernacular literature in Pampango," Quito identified "three ideas which could very well be the cornerstone of the elusive identity of the Filipino as Filipino," namely, the implicit trust in a personal God, the transiency of existence, and the high regard for women.<sup>8</sup> She concludes the essay as follows:

The *diwa* of the Filipino is a way of thinking, a manner of seeing the world, a prescription for living. Other forms of vernacular literature will be studied and

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<sup>7</sup> Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1993; first published 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Quito, *A Life of Philosophy*, 759.

interpreted, and perhaps, one day, we will be able to grasp concretely what this identity of the Filipino truly is.<sup>9</sup>

Compared to the tentativeness which is characteristic of Quito's works, those of Mercado's writings sound more final. There smacks of something rather presumptuously finished in the use of the word 'elements' in at least three of his books, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, *Elements of Filipino Ethics* and *Elements of Filipino Theology*. In the final chapter of the first of these books, Mercado attempts "to synthesize the various aspects of Filipino philosophy."<sup>10</sup> He describes the Filipino worldview as basically non-dualistic, which he defines as "the holistic or non-compartmentalized view of the Filipino of himself in the sense that he wants all his faculties to be in harmony."<sup>11</sup> This nondualism, says Mercado, permeates the Filipino's perceptions of the world, both the physical one and its values, including his *sakop*-mentality, his "harmony-with-nature orientation," his "non-linear concept of time, space, and of causality," even "his philosophy of private property and of law," "the non-dichotomy between the profane and the sacred," etc. etc.<sup>12</sup> Thinly veiling the oriental sources of such a viewpoint, the result is an idealization of the Filipino mind which, however, suffers a crack after a comparison with what Leticia V. Ramos Shahani describes as our "damaged culture."

### **Exploratory Philosophy**

Meanwhile, what of the others who are doing more exploratory work? Traditionally, institutions are known for their established reputation, such as UST for Thomistic and Scholastic philosophy, Ateneo for phenomenology and existentialism, and UP for symbolic logic and analytic philosophy. Although such traditional reputation may not have completely vanished yet, such institutional labels might well be considered more and more rapidly vanishing. Students now go to UST for critical theory, oriental philosophy and even phenomenology, existentialism and hermeneutics. UP's Zosimo Lee is into philosophy for children. And DLSU's students, while doing a lot of analytic philosophy, are also into Indian philosophy and Buddhism.

Today, however, when people challenge us to identify ourselves with some school of thought or, better yet, dare us to evolve one, these people are probably still romantically residing in those glorious days of philosophy when they knew you by the ideological banner you carry, the great divide of which was between phenomenology and

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 760.

<sup>10</sup> Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 191.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 192.

existentialism on the side of the Continent and analytic philosophy on the Anglo-American side. Those were exciting days of philosophy, all right, but they were also rather days of our adolescence when taking sides was the norm; thankfully, this has already been superseded by what's generally known as the paradigm shift. As Alain Badiou famously said, "Heidegger is the last universally recognizable philosopher."<sup>13</sup> That does seem like an acceptable statement, for the productive philosophers of today seem all to have transitioned through Heidegger, never mind the battery of contemporaries faulting him for a deplorable political error of personal decision.

Today, one is incredibly out of sync to expect thinkers to be ideologically based, card bearers of single-minded philosophical schools in combative mood against those who don't think the same. The challenge today is precisely to know philosophy as broadly as possible without however floating in relativistic uncertainty or ambiguous unclarity. Global and inclusive, borderless and creatively evolving is the attitude required of the moment, but this does not in any way mean zero expertise and baseless beginnings. A student has no choice but to choose, and choose well, where to start – which philosophy or philosopher belongs to one's interest and from where one may eventually proceed to what Heidegger calls the clearing,<sup>14</sup> the open and free borderless space, the realm of boundless creativity, Bergson's *élan vital*.

I have this graduate student, let's call him Jet. I think he was on the right track when he adamantly chose to study and eventually write his thesis on Axel Honneth. I must admit that when Jet first broached the idea to me, my instinctive response was to ask, "Honneth who?" Thanks that I did not douse cold water on the idea. Before I knew it, Jet already had all of Honneth's books on his shelf, mostly bought online. Jet, who incidentally is teaching in our SVD university in Cebu, stood by his philosopher, proving to me that this man was worth all the trouble. Today, in fact, if you happen to be in UST and you have not heard of Axel Honneth, then it would be everybody's turn to ask, "And where have you been all these days?" It's like not knowing who the chair of your department was, of course Dr. Paolo Bolaños!

When Jet was reading Honneth, he saw to it that his adviser also had the chance to read him, proving to all and sundry that a student can also be a teacher's good teacher. And Jet was guided too by his growing acquaintance with secondary materials, especially the best of Honneth's critics - Nancy Fraser, Richard Rorty and Christopher

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<sup>13</sup> Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. Oliver Feltham (London: Continuum, 2013), 1.

<sup>14</sup> "Be-ing holds sway in *truth* and is clearing for self-sheltering." Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 21. "For this is what is most essential: that the opening as clearing brings the self-sheltering-concealing to pass and the sheltering of truth thus first of all receives its ground and spur." *Ibid.*, 39-40.



Zurn; he was reading them all, taking his time and waiting for his ideas to mature, which explains the long three years it took before he could present for defense his Master's thesis. Those critics – Fraser, Rorty and Zurn - had the gall to question the authenticity of Honneth's membership to the illustrious *Frankfurter Institut für Sozialforschung*, more popularly known as the Frankfurt School or the School of Critical Theory. Jet was quietly furious with Honneth's critics and that drove him to do his homework, bringing him back to the revered source of it all – none other than Karl Marx, and with Marx to Georg Lukács and Max Weber, thus strengthening his (Jet's) understanding of the classical critique of capitalism and political economy. From there he proceeded to the founders of the Frankfurt School – Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, and then to the second generation of critical theorists, mainly Jürgen Habermas, with a view to clarifying the nature of their critique. In other words, Jet was led to trace his way from Honneth back to Marx and the founders of critical theory just so that he might be able to ascertain both himself and others that his hero, Honneth, is not unfaithful to the original vision of the School. That, in one word, constitutes diligence, the type of diligence that would be to Quito's liking, that diligence which I say we have not yet surpassed.

Even after a successful defense of Jet's masteral thesis, we can see that he has just actually begun the work. We can already foresee the shape, more or less, of his doctoral project, but from there we cannot really fully visualize yet its post-doctoral future. From our position what we can feel is the *élan vital* in progress, working intuitively rather than mechanically, evolving creatively rather than technically being forced by manual procedures. Certainly, Jet is not being motivated in all this by money or success; he is, what you would call, inspired by this demon which Plato elsewhere called *eros*, philosophy. Once, however, Jet allows money or success to rule him, then *eros* will leave him and, at best, technique shall take over.

You will notice that I'm discussing all this in the context of exploratory or descriptive philosophy, usually maligned for what people construe to be devoid of originality. What I'm trying to show you is, in fact, the opposite of that opinion, how in the first place no one can elude the phase of apprenticeship when one has to choose with which philosophy or philosopher to begin. Krishnamurti suggests that one has to follow the thread wherever it leads; initially perhaps, a student needs a mentor until he can already afford to release himself from mentorship. Unfortunately, in our days a paper diploma is not a foolproof evidence of mastery. A student should thus select carefully, whenever possible, the mentor who shall guide him in his growth. In many cases, however, he should take much of the personal initiative toward mastery, himself led by his own inner light inspiring him to pursue and accomplish his work. At the same time he is led by the philosopher of his choice through the latter's texts, especially, when available, the so-called *magnum opus*. This is why a student should also choose carefully the philosopher he will study, and the choice should not be based on how easy it is to do the

work. In my own case, I chose Kant precisely because he was, to me, the most difficult philosopher of all, who left a lacuna in my education despite the longest time spent on him by my teacher in the classroom. And I never regretted having made that decision. It always pays having to be apprenticed by the best of philosophers, no matter how difficult.

You might think that Kant is a most original philosopher. Actually, he would have most likely asked you what original philosophy of his you might perhaps be talking about, for in truth he has not designed the architectonic of any established philosophy. What he left us with is the *critique of pure reason*, which, I tell my students, is the completion of Descartes' *method of universal doubt*. Too, in the case of Descartes, what comes after his methodic doubt, which he hoped would be the structure of an invincible, indubitable philosophy, is almost without value. Happily, in Kant's case, we have a philosopher who is widely conscious of his negative achievement, if you call achievement what makes us profoundly see how little we know, how wise is Socrates who knows that he knows nothing. Isn't this also the content of Taoist wisdom and the meaning of the Hindu *neti, neti*? All Kant could do by way of contributing to a positive philosophy is give suggestions on how to construct such a philosophy, what in the last part of the *Critique of Pure Reason* he calls "Method of Transcendentalism."

Allow me to discuss briefly this so-called "method of transcendentalism," for I know of no better way of doing Filipino philosophy than by first keeping in mind these four recommendations of Kant. First, we should not forget the *discipline* referred to as the critique of pure reason, which is not so much a critique of other philosophers and systems as a self-critique, our application of the Socratic injunction, "Know thyself," resulting in the recognition that we cannot know anything absolutely in itself but only as it appears to us and our faculties. This has to do, of course, with the famous conclusion of Kant regarding phenomenon and noumenon. If we take that lesson seriously to heart, we will find how such a self-knowledge exerts its immense influence on us, so that we shall see how arrogance in philosophy is a contradiction in terms and how our vaunted knowledge is, without exaggeration, as the bible says, foolishness to God. Second, of what use is our so-called knowledge which if, taken for its own sake, is without much value? The *canon* teaches us always to use our reason in such a way that we obey nothing but our good will, thus ensuring that our conduct does not err, always deserving of happiness even when life is treating us less than fairly. Knowledge is therefore nothing if it doesn't serve the purposes of life. With the discipline and the canon now firmly in place, we may now engage, thirdly, in our theoretical venture the way we are inspired to do. That means building the *architectonic* of pure reason, philosophizing as you will. That amounts to boundless freedom on the part of a responsible philosopher aware of his or her own discipline and its practical applications. But, finally, a philosopher after Kant's heart is expected to possess a competent and exhaustive knowledge of the history of philosophy.

All that—discipline, canon, architectonic and history—makes the work of a philosopher truly hard. Now you see what I am really criticizing about the anthropological approach, not only the anthropological approach but also the descriptive and exploratory approach, as commonly practiced in the Philippines. I have actually no quarrel with any approach or method, so long as due diligence is observed. No work should be done haphazardly. Research is meant to be tedious and requires meticulous attention. Even so, we should not demand of our students what we do not even have the guts to demand of ourselves. We should not impose untimely progress on our students, but we should challenge them to beat and go beyond themselves.

Now you see why I am not averse to exploratory or descriptive philosophy as a possible source of Filipino philosophy. By descriptive philosophy I mean the study of any major philosophy or philosopher, whether of the East or of the West, that might interest any of our students; that it interests him or her is enough reason for me to call it relevant. There is even much that we can consider wrong with, say, doing Bergson and then suddenly shifting to, say, the drug problem in the country, artificially forcing the philosophy of the *élan vital* into an area of problematic relevance to creative evolution. Bergson is difficult enough for a student, and yet, if adequately understood, also life-changing. To focus on creative evolution will bring the student to a conception of matter and form he or she is possibly not used to, one that spells a radical shift of insight from the classical to the post-classical, from Aristotelian abstraction to Bergsonian intuition. It will facilitate the student's way of understanding the methodic concreteness of phenomenology as an access to the essences of things themselves and why this constitutes the evolution of man into a species higher than that of a rational animal, what Nietzsche calls *Übermensch* and Heidegger calls *Dasein*, Confucius' *man of jen*.

Unless our students are able to read the primary sources, they will not gain philosophical confidence; they will forever be haunted by the thought that their thoughts are shaped only by secondary sources, including those of their teachers. We train our students in research precisely in order for them to be liberated from us and the classroom. And that's not possible if we do not challenge them to deal with the great works. Dealing with the great works - this is what I meant by descriptive and exploratory philosophy when I first made mention of it many decades ago.

At the same time we should keep in mind what the new philosophers are trying to tell us, that we are *Dasein*, *being-in-the-world*; thus, we can no longer philosophize in an ivory tower. It is not correct to confine legitimate philosophy to what we ourselves are doing, whether that's anthropological, descriptive or any other, for that will make Filipino philosophy impoverished indeed. Rather, the new language of philosophy admits of anything, so long as it is grounded in the world and its situation; we cannot afford to alienate ourselves and our thoughts from the sphere of our existence, the warp and woof of our life and work.

It's about time we, philosophers, should feel responsible for the mess our country is experiencing today. For generations now our people have entrusted to us the task of forming the character of our youth. If not for K to 12 we would be continuing to do logic and ethics the way we always used to. And if logic means correct thinking, and ethics means righteous living, the way we have been doing them in the classroom must have been a great failure indeed, considering the culture of graft and corruption, of mediocrity and hypocrisy, that is widely prevalent in our society at present, no doubt one big cause for the country's massive poverty. Proof of this is the shameless stealing of the people's money by big names in our legislature, products of the best schools in the country, supposedly more intelligent and better educated than the average Filipino – such brazen act of corruption cannot, by any stretch, be called correct thinking and righteous living. Classroom logic has largely remained there – in the classroom, where it has turned out to be, in large part, sheer paper work and a chase for grades on the part of the students, and just another load equivalent to an increase in money income on the part of the teachers. Something must have gone terribly wrong in the way we teach logic and ethics in our schools, and something must be done about it, considering that, thankfully, even in light of K to 12 our people does not seem to have fully given up on the idea that logic and ethics have a great value of their own. However, it cannot be the same business as usual for us; we have to find effective means of teaching these so-called basic courses; we must take the task, I would even say mission, seriously.

Martin Heidegger took the matter seriously, writing at least one entire book entitled *What is called Thinking?* Nay, we might even say that the whole of his life's advocacy could have been dedicated to the cause of making humans think correctly. It is not farfetched to say that that's what is meant by his indictment of the human condition as a state of forgetfulness of being. *Being and Time* is, to say the least, epoch-making in that it advocates for no less than the radical transformation of the human from *animal rationale* to *Dasein*. That's not just a renewal of the same human being; that's the emergence of a newly evolved species beyond man, the rational animal; that's the true paradigm shift, tantamount to an entirely new beginning. Thinking in this way is no longer thinking, as usual, from reason; it is thinking (for lack of an available term, Heidegger coins a word) *vom Ereignis*. This is post-rational thinking; not irrational nor non-rational nor anti-rational, but *post-rational* thinking, thinking *vom Ereignis*. We have too little time to expand on the meaning of thinking *vom Ereignis*; it is also not the intent of this lecture to do so; but I have to make mention of this because any thinking, especially philosophical thinking, that really matters today is no longer simply an intellectual, rational, exercise; it has to come *vom Ereignis*. That explains the significant place given today to Heidegger, why (despite his error in political judgment) he continues to exert enormous influence on people globally, to the extent that it can be said that no philosopher who matters today has not passed through him.

You don't have to be conscious of it to be thinking *vom Ereignis*. Allow me, to illustrate what I mean, by bringing to your attention a recently published work by one probably unknown to you, Charito J. Pizarro. When her book, *The Symbolic Mediation: From the Stonehenge to the Eye* was launched, somewhat improperly launched I would say, at the University of San Carlos sometime in February this year, I described it as "a book in philosophy still unparalleled in the country" and predicted that it "would outlive us all in importance." Not even the author, who obtained her Ph.D. in the University of Heidelberg in both philosophy and literature, would have understood what I meant. In fact, in my review, I anticipated as a first question readers might raise "whether this work of Dr. Pizarro is actually a philosophical work." I answered unequivocally with a yes; "this," I said, "is philosophy in the mode of Heidegger's quite harmlessly sounding 'contributions' (*Beiträge*), that is, doing philosophy *vom Ereignis*."

You will please allow me to quote my review a bit lengthily by way of explaining what I mean to say:

Thinking *vom Ereignis*, from Enowning (which is how Emad and Maly translate *Ereignis*), does not shun the use of the imagination. For this Heidegger resurrects the Greek *poiesis*. One may here recall Pascal's charming words, "The heart has a reason which reason itself does not understand." Heidegger's reference point is no longer Descartes' *cogito* or "I think" but Kant's enigmatic statement concerning "the two stems of knowledge, which perhaps may spring from a common root, unknown to us." The enigma points not to the two stems of knowledge, our senses and our intellect, with which we are familiar, but to "the common root, unknown to us." This unknown common root of all knowledge has been, in fact, identified even by Kant, according to Heidegger, as the imagination, the source of *phusis* and *poiesis*, that is, of all that we create. The new philosophy consists in thinking from this source which, to tell the truth, is better left unnamed (for even the word imagination can be taken too lightly and mistaken for some of our customary habits of thought). It is then perhaps very well that Heidegger has given it a new name, which is not a name at all, for we can almost say that we don't know what it means: this thinking from *Ereignis*.

Thinking *vom Ereignis* is not your usual type of thinking, which is thinking from your intellectual side, thus rational and analytical thinking. Jiddu Krishnamurti, on many occasions in his dialogues and conversations, would ask his listeners not so much to think as to 'see' and 'observe'. "When you see and observe this way," he would say, "you manifest true intelligence." In short, it would be difficult to make sense of what Dr. Pizarro is trying to say in her book if one would be coming merely from the head, from one's intellectual side. One must rather come from *poiesis*, *vom Ereignis*, from the depth of one's authentic self which is the source of all creativity in us, that heart which according to Pascal has reasons which reason itself does not know, the middle term (the unknown, common root) between

what Kant refers to as the two stems of knowledge. If you can do that, then (again, going by Heidegger) you are no longer what man used to be, a rational animal; you must have become a transformed self, *Dasein*. Thus, you are *Dasein* if you think *vom Ereignis*.

I encourage you to buy and read this book of Charito Pizarro, a Filipino, if you want to understand what I'm trying to say about the new philosophy. As I also said in my review, "Perhaps the greatest service of Dr. Pizarro's book is that it manages to teach us how to do that, thinking *vom Ereignis*, precisely by doing it." Whether the author herself is conscious of what she was able to accomplish is beside the point; as Gadamer says, "The text takes a life of its own." So, count now Pizarro in your list of Filipino philosophers, and let's watch if there is another book coming.

Incidentally, not everyone is a book writer – that's another thing I'd like to bring to your attention today. My so-called books are not books; they are textbooks, not the run-of-the-mill type, I'd like to think, but still only text books, and not properly books. Pizarro's book *is* a book, developing its theme from page one to last, and yet (and this is one more improper thing about Pizarro's book) it is packaged to look like a textbook. As the popular saying goes, let you not be deceived by its cover. There are actually just a few book writers among us, besides the fact that book writers are not an encouraged species in our country. (Imagine them selling their own books!)

Again, forgive me for not being exhaustive (I don't claim to know everything that's happening even in my own backyard), and for naming only the names of those whom I happen to come across with. But here are two names whose career in philosophy you should follow. I refer to Paolo Bolaños of UST and Raymun Festin of Christ the King Mission Seminary. They both received their Ph.D. abroad, if that means anything to you, the former from Australia and the latter from Belgium. Bolaños just broke through the foreign press; I've seen the book but not actually read it because I didn't own the copy; my copy has not reached me yet. But I know Paolo and know the quality of his work; and a first book is often one to which its author has given his best. So, without doubt, that book is one to reckon with.

Festin, you might not know it yet, has now two books in his name, and is preparing a third, I heard. How he managed to do that in the midst of a very busy schedule must be thanks to personal resources, including those of his friends and family, I'm sure. In my review of his first book, *Beliefs and Certitudes*, I said:

Here's a work in philosophy that's many things besides. It is first of all a contemporary apologetic for belief and religion, a scathingly blunt, effective and intelligent move intended to cut against today's "sloppy atheism." This is no cheap pietistic gimmick by a traditionalist but a thoroughly argued defense of faith in a philosophical language that's clear, popular and elegant. Any literate

Filipino who knows his English will be surprised to find a supposedly abstruse subject expressed in a pleasing and accessible medium, brought down to the level of the ordinary thinking man. And that's what makes this little book (of 123 pages) doubly interesting: it is Filipino philosophy in a refreshing style, departing from the usual self-conscious efforts at writing one.<sup>15</sup>

Festin's second book, simply titled *Mindfulness*, is an even more ambitious work of 437 pages, the best history of philosophy by a Filipino so far, at the same time his personal statement of what philosophy means. Toward the end of the book, he says: "Being mindful means having that special sort of 'seeing' that allows us to discern concealed patterns behind the unfolding of events. Everyday experience shows that things are oftentimes not really what they seem to us. That we can be grossly wrong in our judgments is a truth that has been proven irrefutable, time and again. Since we can be blind to some aspects of reality, we have to be heedful of the fact that there are dimensions that can be assessed only if we are sensitive to the overtones, the backgrounds and the *unsayables*."<sup>16</sup>

Both Bolaños and Festin are for our emulation; they write books. Most of us write, at best, journal essays and articles, professional and duly documented ones; ours may look good when collected, but they may not pass for books. This is not to say that a collection of speeches and articles may not be counted as a book; some of the best ones do qualify, such as the ones of Alfred North Whitehead. Alfredo Co's seven volumes of his *Festschrift* are, properly speaking, not yet books, although that collection is enough to make his name indelible, one which no one can possibly ignore. The good news is that he's coming up with another multivolume collection, this time of journal publications that would depict the history of philosophy in his beloved pontifical university.

I would like to alert you, too, to the re-issue of some of the books of the revered Roque Ferriols of the Ateneo de Manila. I just got two of them, his *Pambungad sa Metapisika* and *Pilosopiya ng Relihiyon*. These might count as books, but also as textbooks, and their largest contribution is toward the building of a Filipino philosophy in the language Filipinos speak: Tagalog. We may or may not agree with the translation of 'being' as *meron*, but the word is one with which we are now more than familiar; the word simply sticks.

If there's anything I'm sorry about, it is that I can't be complete and exhaustive in this paper. I have to mention names because I need to show more than theoretically the actual possibilities for a Filipino philosophy today, and yet I know I lack the necessary

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<sup>15</sup> See blurb to Raymun J. Festin, *Beliefs and Certitudes* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Raymun J. Festin, *Mindfulness* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2012), 359.

exposure to everything that's being done and written today. I will therefore appreciate feedback especially from those who have some suggestions and ideas to contribute to the discussion about Filipino philosophy and how people I might not have acquaintance with might be doing it today. For instance, we should not forget the Polytechnic University of the Philippines which has a thriving crop of young philosophy faculty whose influence on their students we cannot overestimate; the last thing I heard is that they have released the first issue of their philosophical journal; let's wish this well.

Speaking of journals, the annual PHAVISMINDA Journal of the University of San Carlos can very well be regarded as the most consistent professional journal of philosophy in the country today. DIWA of the Divine Word Seminary of Tagaytay could very well beat it, except that the journal is not exclusive to philosophy; it is home to two disciplines, philosophy and theology. KARUNUNGAN, the most exclusive journal based in UST, has not appeared for two years now. SOPHIA of DLSU became PHILOSOPHIA, which then left the institution together with its editor. Most promising is KRITIKE, the only online philosophical journal which is being supported by UST; so far, it has not skipped an issue, and every issue has been duly refereed. And PAP's *Suri* is fresh; we shall see yet how stable and reputable it can get.

Colleges and universities are in a rush to get themselves recognized as globally competitive, no small thanks to K to 12. It seems I'm the only one not rushing to get published in an international journal; I'm already of that age, you see, when one can afford not to obtain academic points for publication; of course, I see to it that I write and publish papers yearly, even if only in our lowly local journals. I think we should keep the supply of articles to our indigenous journals coming; we should not let them die a natural death. I don't understand why we should have a dearth of papers for publication, unless the research papers of our graduate students and faculty are plagued by plagiarism. We need young, enterprising entrepreneurs who understand the value of ideas and are willing to invest on publishing journals and professional books; some of us might want to talk about this beyond this conference. In these new times there must be new ways of doing things, and we can start making the young Filipinos design something commercially successful out of serious academic products like philosophy.

The least that we need is crab mentality, infamous for wishing the others ill. Of course, we can wish the other ill only if we wish our selves, and only ourselves, well. Even among philosophers, we need to work together to promote the discipline whose value we believe in. What are we for, if we do not strive to make ideas grow and prosper in the only backyard we know, our own neighborhood, this land we call our own, the Philippines?



## A Historical Tale

Time was when there was no Philippines, when there were only isolated islands sparsely populated by various people who crossed the waters from Indonesia, Malaya, India and China. They didn't have to know each other; they merely lived and survived. Slowly they associated with each other and they were already starting to establish a society when their indigenous efforts were interrupted.

The white men came, but that was already 1521, already the 16th century at about the time Martin Luther was nailing his 95 theses on the door of the Cathedral of Wittenberg, almost at the dawn of modernity in the West. The first Spaniards, led - we were told - by the Portuguese Ferdinand Magellan, were only partially successful. At least they reached the islands of spices and one of their boats was even able to return to Spain, proof enough that the earth was not flat. And they came again, later in the same century, and this time they meant to conquer and stay. They covered some islands, complete with sword and the cross, and subjugated the peoples. One advantage of being so subjugated is that people who otherwise did not know each other started to feel like they were alike. So, indeed, the Spaniards not only discovered, they also originated, even created, the Philippines, deliberately and, at the same time, not deliberately. Deliberately they subjugated the land and its people, but the spirit of the people could not fully be made to succumb. And so there was born the First Filipino, Jose Rizal.

And the rest, as they say, is history. My presentation of our pre-history and early history is, of course, subject to scrutiny and, because full of holes, to plenty of objections. The point of my tale is only that the philosophy of our people began only when our people started to *be*, much more so if we mean our academic philosophy. The first thing to see is that the Filipino, as Filipino, is no pristine creature; even his name shows it. He would not have become a Filipino if he were not subjugated by Spain. So, in a way, if there were no Spaniards, there would be no Philippines. Our history, as well as our spirit, is intertwined with them, whether we like it or not. That is the fact of our beginnings. If Rizal is the first Filipino, then we were born already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, about the time of Marx, past the Enlightenment period.

I think the Filipino today easily connects with Rizal, which is the reason for the ease by which we do what we call descriptive or exploratory philosophy, which is just another way of referring to what is simply called philosophy. The anthropological philosophy is some sort of our defiant child which seeks to stretch our meaning of Filipino to the time before the birth of the first Filipino, which we tend to call Filipino just the same anyway, no matter how, strictly speaking, inappropriately it might seem. The defiance consists in the refusal to advance in time and the insistence on a return to the supposedly uncorrupted pre-Hispanic past. That would be possible if we could produce adequate written literature that could stand on its own apart from anything Hispanic. The earliest

document, it seems, is the so-called Laguna Copperplate Inscription which dated c. 900 A.D., and there are not too many of these documents. What we have cannot fairly compete with the materials dated 600 B.C. of India, China and Greece.

There's another option for anthropological philosophy in the absence of hard literary evidence. Structural linguistics would study existing languages in all their forms, as appropriately selected, and through systematic comparison might yield results as to an internal meaning that might be lying unsuspected before. There is a certain spiritual connection that belongs to the latent content of our language, which might be called Filipino philosophy. However, since this type of research deals with existing usages of language, it will be difficult to call it authentically original and indigenous since, as far as I know, no contemporary language remains undiluted by extraneous influences. Whether it's Tagalog, Bisaya, Ilocano or any other Philippine language, it cannot anymore be said to be pristine.

You see that I'm not against anthropological philosophy. If I am not favorable to any philosophy, it is to one that is not critical of its own limitations on the basis of which judgment is meted out unfairly against other philosophies. I'd rather go, therefore, by Kant's position in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that "it is useful to grant to reason the fullest freedom . . . Allow, therefore, your adversary to speak reason, and combat him with weapons of reason only . . . Reason is thus improved only by a consideration of both sides of her subject."<sup>17</sup>

## Conclusion

If there is any divide among Filipino philosophers today, I'd say that it's not anymore between those siding with Continental philosophy and those with Anglo-American philosophy. Rather, our division seems to me between those using the anthropological approach and those using the exploratory or descriptive approach. Between the two, the former is more restrictive than the latter; in fact, a descriptivist may not reject the anthropologist, which is why I go rather for an exploratory or descriptive philosophy which does not reject the other method.

I think the real concern we have is, in the end, not even one of method, but of that factor which, as I contend above, is the reason why Quito is up to today the Filipino philosopher to beat, and that factor is diligence. Any philosophical interest we have, no matter what method is used, should not suffer rejection and should therefore have a place in philosophy. But in the end it will be history which will decide which works will stand the test of time, which writings will really matter in the actual development of

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<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. F. Max Müller (New York: Doubleday & Company Anchor Books, 1966), 482.

Filipino philosophy. I imagine that diligence, which is required if one is to produce a rigorous and outstanding work, will eventually manage to win the day for us.

I would also suggest that since ours is a time that has experienced the global paradigm shift, the irreversible transition to the new beginning, there is no way that we can stretch the time back, no way to go back to the past. No longer merely a rational being, the philosopher today can no longer be doing philosophy the way we used to. Here Kant is the landmark to remember; we need always to keep in mind his critique of pure reason. The newly evolved human is a *being-in-the-world* and can no longer think apart from the concreteness of his or her situation. It would be presumptuous of today's philosopher to think in isolation from the personal and social concerns of his or her time. The world in which we, Filipinos, live cannot be divorced from our people's sufferings as defined by our own experience of oppression and deprivation, poverty and injustice, concerns which we have daily to contend with. How to live amidst our damaged character and culture, how to liberate ourselves from a past remote from the peace and equipoise of Adamic paradise, how to reckon with the rapid and radical changes of this technologically conditioned era – these are realities the Filipino philosopher has not only to live with but also draw insights from. This is not merely a matter of psychology, as Husserl and the others earlier told us; to face these challenges we need, yes, an ontologically transformed self.

Filipino philosophers have the task of making the importance of philosophy felt in the life of the ordinary Filipino, not by watering down the seriousness of the discipline and adjusting to the whims of entertaining media, but by being true to its nature as a source of authentic ideas. Philosophy is nothing if it does not dwell in these ideas which, however, can no longer be coming from sheer reason but, as Heidegger would put it, *vom Ereignis*, from the concrete human experience as a being-in-the-world. It is no longer possible to contemplate oneself in a separate world of ideas, perfect in all ways, while living a corrupt and dark life destructive of ecology and society. Such a double life of hypocrisy is not possible anymore where one is thinking *vom Ereignis*. This is the true meaning of logic and ethics as, respectively, correct thinking and righteous living – and attaining this is no less than philosophy's business.

When one has attained that, all else is allowable – whatever you write, wherever you publish or deliver it, no matter whether it makes points or not for your own professional ranking or for the academic accreditation of your institution, whatever you do in life; as Rousseau would say, it is the sphere that never errs, the realm which, according to Nietzsche, is beyond good and evil. And so, as Christ himself says, "seek ye first this kingdom and all the other things will be given you besides."

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