

Five Assumptions on the Illusion 'Filipino Philosophy' (A Prelude to a Cultural Critique)¹

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Abstract: I argue how Filipino philosophy is an illusion, that we have taken as a belief, and that we need to remember again that it is an illusion—but a *necessary* one—in order for it to flourish. It has become a normative concept that impels the direction of discourse: *what is philosophy?* For new directions to be realized, the language of Filipino philosophy must remain negative. The illusion must be remembered once more: a nihilistic stance for new values to be created. I raise the question of the non-identical character of language—of how nature is far larger than concepts—which makes misrepresentation possible. This is evident in society—leaders to population, praxis to theory, philosophy to culture. The non-identity reifies the illusion into belief which necessitates a decadent type of rationality. The illusory status of the nomenclature must be remembered once more in order for the dialectic to continue. In seeking new directions for Filipino philosophy, it is not enough that a new breed of thinkers merely

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accept the value ascribed to it—along with the numerous errors and nuisances inherited along the way—but to *create* new value.

Keywords: Filipino philosophy, devaluation, negative language, cultural critique

ONE

Each epoch in the history of philosophy continuously challenges its fundamental principles to find new meaning; the centrality of the question—*What is philosophy?*—remains a vital query. In the Philippine intellectual landscape, this question stimulates thinkers to create value for formerly esteemed concepts. Likewise, I seek to root out the tenacity of such movement: what value has been ascribed to philosophy?

Why *Filipino* and not *Philippine* philosophy? I posit how the change in word creates a difference in reception. The former espouses something familiar, while the latter impersonal. Strictly speaking, *Philippine* is the proper adjectival form (equivalent to German, Chinese, Indian to Germany, China, and India respectively) but I would like to speculate why “*Filipino* philosophy” remained. The familiarity bonded intellectuals closely in this dialectic. Despite some nuisance in method, what is clear is that we have all clung to this illusion—accepting *Filipino* rather than *Philippine*.² What I

² In juxtaposing Philippine and Filipino, the former is commonly used for government, currency, animals, and others while the latter for art, philosophy, cuisine, music, and others. Indeed, there can be no clear distinction—I do not claim to be a linguist—but I delineate their usage and implications: the former with inanimate nouns (national anthem, war on drugs), some animate nouns (eagle, tamaraw, carabao), or with individuals or institutions representing the entire nation (president, government, constitution, Peso; [PNP] national police; [PAGASA] Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration). The latter on the other hand is the adjectival noun (the Filipino) and is used, albeit the peculiarities and irregularities, as an adjective for some nouns (music, philosophy, consciousness, time). Between the two, there are some nouns which adjectives are interchangeable (cuisine, architecture, art). What I wish to point out here is how there is this sense of identity between the Filipino (the person speaking) and the object spoken. The usage of the adjective reflects the degree of identity. Sans the nuisance of grammar, there are some nouns that are just used with Filipino: time (not to be confused with

offer is not a pejorative account of the methodologies but a genealogy of this fixation with a *Filipino* identity—one that brings about thought, speech, and action, and a perlocutionary effect of an intimate issue’s personal defense, i.e., being a Filipino.

First assumption: we have agreed to use “Filipino” philosophy.

TWO

The usage of the adjective reflects a Filipino identity. In either accepting or rejecting the actuality of Filipino philosophy, what is presumed is the identity of the *Filipino*—as opposed to the occurrence of the *Philippine*. The choice of word—language in the literal sense—mirrors the identity of the individual to the concept (philosophy); and the level of engagement—language in the metaphorical sense—mirrors the type of discourse. In the advent of recognizing Filipino philosophy, what I find problematic is the (absence of the) affirmation of philosophical praxis especially in language; the necessity of dialogue is not that simple: It is an internal struggle for recognition amid cultural violence.³ The essay is a genealogy, noting certain

Philippine Standard Time), consciousness, philosophy. Rarely discoursed on an English platform, these ideas find their root explicitly in culture, in being Filipino. The interchangeability between adjectives—cuisine, architecture, art—reflect their trans-historical position of either having foreign roots (notable artists, especially during the colonial period, studied and mastered their arts abroad) or being maintained in the foreign palette of the *alta ciudad*. Finally, the more commonly English adjective-used nouns—government, currency—show their international traces of imposition—how the present government system is a totally foreign concept to pre-colonial Filipinos, the exchange value of the Peso sharing the same status – or of mere representationalism in a global landscape—the “Philippine” (ambassador, president, representative) addressed in an international assembly.

³ Postscript note: These musings I consider a prelude to cultural critique. From realizing some assumptions on Filipino philosophy, a further discussion comes by looking into the tenants of Filipino society or of a mythologization of morality rather than metaphysics. That subsequent idea focuses on this theme of the struggle of violence and recognition in the cultural landscape, the consciousness, and in effect philosophy. A cultural critique is needed for philosophy to flourish having the country as its locale—while we need to further establish institutes of higher learning that prize philosophy to further propagate

pathologies that I mark as assumptions, that reflect ideological thought taken as ‘identity.’

Filipino philosophy is an illusion—but a *necessary* one. “The affirmation of life requires ‘illusion.’”⁴ Philosophical praxis cannot be separated from life because the former’s task is to “finally bring to light the assumptions on which the movement of *reason* depends.”⁵ There is no distinction between thinking and living; thus, rather than philosophy’s trajectory at merely the visceral occurrences or social phenomena, there must a profound importance given to thinking, to the dialectical movement; an impairment to reason is an impediment to freedom.

Akin to the judgement of morality is the value of Filipino philosophy for the crux of its impetus: “of the will to truth.”⁶ In search for an actual Filipino philosophy, the root has been its truth-value, the existence of records, the validity of mythological accounts, the conception of a collective consciousness, and of the immediacy to truth or whose method encompasses the entirety. In all these, what is evident is the above first assumption. It is indeed a truth but “our forgetfulness of truth as illusion, as an ‘anthropomorphic army of metaphors and metonymies,’ is the basis of our confusion between object and concept, and it is through this forgetfulness that the *reification* of concepts becomes a logical consequence.”⁷ To operate under the idea of *finding* what *true* philosophy is reifies the notion of it. Hence, the language becomes petrifying; the concept more real than nature. Philosophy’s freedom in this sense is

the discourse and discipline. Thus, this essay serves as an introduction that probes into some essential characteristics of the immanent pathologies of Filipino philosophy’s language that, in my opinion, occasions the need for such struggle branded as assumptions.

⁴ Bernard Reginster, “Art and Affirmation,” in *Nietzsche on Art and Life*, ed. by Daniel Came (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 15.

⁵ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the critique of Greek philosophy,” in *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, ed. by Rüdiger Bittner, trans. by Kate Struge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), §7. Italics remained.

⁶ See *Ibid.*, 2.

⁷ Paolo A. Bolaños, “Thinking Difference: Nietzsche and Adorno on the Ethics of Thinking,” in *Culture, Politics, Ethics: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Scott H. Boyd, Ana Cristina Gil, and Baldwin Wong (Oxford: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2009), 58.

ideological, like “the captivating illusion ... construed as primacy over the objects of nature, culminating in the inwardization of subjectivity—that the subject comes to assume a ‘perverted’ image of its separation from nature.”⁸

Second assumption: Filipino philosophy is reified in seeking truth-value.

THREE

We have Greek philosophy as a model.⁹ I agree—albeit with some reservations—and in taking them as a model, philosophy is led to discourse. Through time, the contents of discourse have changed and is heavily influenced by the socio-cultural events: be it transcendental realities—as arguments for fixed realities to social institutions such as the monarch—or the tangible atrocities—reactions to horror and violence. The shift from one focus to another is the imminent critique of philosophy, of its non-identical character:

The critical examination of the language of philosophy should be construed as an immanent feature of philosophy if philosophy is to survive. Such immanent critique reveals not only the genealogical element of conceptual reification, but also reminds philosophy of its very own self-understanding and receptivity to the non-identical.¹⁰

⁸ Paolo A. Bolaños, “From Rigidity to Receptivity: Articulating an Ethics of Thinking via Nietzsche and Adorno,” in *Representation and Contestation: Cultural Politics in a Political Century*, ed. Ching-Yu Lin and John McSweeney (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2010), 169.

⁹ See Rolando M. Gripaldo, “Filipino Philosophy: Past and Present,” in *Kaisipan: Opisyal Dyornal ng Isabuhay, Saliksikin, Ibigin ang Pilosopia* (ISIP) 1, no. 1 (2013): 1-2, <https://www.academia.edu/6363265/Filipino_Philosophy_Past_and_Present_2013_>.

¹⁰ Paolo A. Bolaños, “The Promise of the Non-Identical: Adorno’s Revaluation of the Language of Philosophy,” in *Discipline Filosofiche*, 26: 2 (2016), 152.

The task of philosophy is to challenge its own reification and realize its place as reactionary. It works in retrospect, as history unfolds, illuminating certain illusions that have become pathological. It takes form through a historical consideration of cultural violence—such that “the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the breaking of twilight.”¹¹ Culture is violent in that it truncates the individual to his own subjective plane—from which he objectivizes reality. Wherefore the Greeks are considered the paradigm, but are they worth emulating? “The appearance of the Greek philosophers [is] a symptom of decadence.”¹² What is in the Greeks that is worth emulating and overlooking? Socrates who questioned, Plato who wrote, and Aristotle who disagreed, but even further are the Pre-Socratics who distanced from myths and engaged with ultimate reality, but “the ‘philosopher’ in contrast, is the *reaction*: he wants the *old* virtue.”¹³ We can distance our discourse from myth as what the Greeks did, but it would be a mistake to ascribe philosophy and myth except to see the latter in light of the former. In myth—hyperboles, metaphors, fiction—we see a possibility of another state of things that can be used to question the present. The rejuvenation of myth excites reason and continuously challenges the ordinary to make us wonder: *Have things always been like this? A mythological conception can question the present setup of reality and a play with Filipino fiction can present this realization amongst many more: si Maganda naman ay lumabas din sa kamayan katulad ni Malakas. Hindi siya nanggaling sa tadyang ng lalaki kaya bakit mayroong mas mababang pagtingin sa babae kaysa sa lalaki? Hindi ba’t pantay ang dalawa na nanggaling lamang sa kawayan?*

Third assumption: Greek philosophy was at the twilight of reason as it distanced itself from myths.

¹¹ „Die Eule der Minerva beginnt erst mit der einbrechenden Dämmerung ihren Flug.” Translation is mine. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, “Vorrede,” in *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft, 1820), 15.

¹² Nietzsche, “On the critique of Greek philosophy,” in *Writings from the Late Notebooks*, §11.

¹³ *Ibid.*

FOUR

It is at twilight that philosophy makes sense. The historical method is “the truly *philosophical* approach as *traditionally* used;”¹⁴ but the brand of a nationalistic (Filipino, German, French) philosophy is understood as an exonym, not the label of a continuous development. Through a historical account of thinkers, the intellectual movement is identified and even the assumption “that prominent personalities of Philippine history are already philosophers.”¹⁵ Supposing this is true: Yes, these thinkers had their own philosophical positions, yet the failure lies in the decisive difference between formulating this position (as seen through the convictions of these people and their writings) and an opposing reaction. It is the lack of philosophical praxis. In this dialectic movement, Filipino philosophy should take shape through a continuous interpretation: “s/he hermeneutically derives what to him/her is the meaning of the text, then s/he is expressing his/her own mind. In other words, the interpretative output is the product or the expression of a *Filipino mind*.”¹⁶ The socio-cultural resource is insufficient to create thinkers, but there must be the lineage of their academic tradition.

Philosophy becomes a representation of the clash between consciousness (socio-cultural factors) and the academic tradition. I find it obnoxious why there is a fork in this understanding:

Philosophy can be viewed from an academic perspective and from a cultural perspective. Academic Philosophy is made by scholars who devote and dedicate their lives in formulating formal philosophies. ... Meanwhile, a cultural

¹⁴ Gripaldo, “Filipino Philosophy: Past and Present,” 2.

¹⁵ Jeremiah Joven B. Joaquin, “Gripaldo and Mabaquiao on Filipino Philosophy: A Critical Assessment of Two Attempts to Establish a Filipino Philosophy,” in *Dalumat*, 1:1 (2010), 124.

¹⁶ Rolando M. Gripaldo, *Filipino Philosophy: A Critical, 1774-1997*, 2d Ed. (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2000), 5.

philosophy is a philosophy *sui generis* ... constructed by a group of ordinary people (ethnos) that results in an empirical and observably unique but not idiosyncratic worldview.¹⁷

Philosophy represents the impact of consciousness (the social, economic, cultural, political conditions) on the academic tradition, and so a revelation—and reevaluation—of a worldview. The way we think is a process of interpretation; the *Volksgeist* is a hermeneutic approach to reality as a whole (*Geist*).¹⁸ We do not have sufficient concepts to reflect the totality of language—the non-identical character—thus we are dependent on interpretation: “Interpretation is philosophy’s receptivity to the non-identical structure of reality.”¹⁹

Filipino philosophy should represent the perspective of the Filipino in the dialectic. At present, we have a plethora of material available ranging from anthologies to some *Sprachspiele* juxtaposing ethnic words to foreign concepts, from socio-cultural experiences to even analytic, *a priori* justifications.²⁰ Does this reflect the Philippine interpretation (*Volksgeist*) of reality (*Geist*)? Education plays a significant role in this representation, but due to the numerous incongruities in the system I wish not to list them down; plainly put instead of speaking of the miseducation of the Filipino,²¹ I concede to a misrepresentation of the Filipino. Misrepresentation in this context is both descriptive and evaluative: It is descriptive in describing the

¹⁷ Emmanuel D. Batoon, “Tracing Mercado’s Anthropological Perspective (First of Two Parts),” in *Kritike*, 8: 1 (June 2014), 2-3, <http://kritike.org/journal/issue_15/batoon_december2014.pdf>.

¹⁸ I present *Volksgeist* in this respect in light to the totality of reality, *Geist*. Hence, *Volksgeist* is part of the entirety of *Geist*, as a manifestation in a particular socio-historical-cultural milieu.

¹⁹ Bolaños, “The Promise of the Non-Identical,” 159.

²⁰ *Sprachspiele* in the linguistic analysis of, but not limited to, Timbreza and Mercado, while the *a priori* classification in, but not limited to, Demetrio’s sixteen meanings of Filipino philosophy.

²¹ A play with Renato Constantino’s “Miseducation of the Filipino”, (1959) in *The Filipinos in the Philippines and Other Essays* (Manila: Malaya Books, 1966), 39-65.

showing the identity between language and nature; and evaluative in the proximity to the truth-value, i.e. being aware of the illusion qua illusion.

Fourth assumption: Filipino philosophy is misrepresented.

FIVE

“Plainly put: the idea of science (*Wissenschaft*) is research; that of philosophy is interpretation.”²² It is only critique that produces philosophy. “Critique alone, as the unity of the problem and its arguments, not the adoption of received theses, has laid the foundation for what may be considered the productive unity of the history of philosophy.”²³ Rather than publication output, philosophy should center on discourse, on a critique of its own language: “All philosophical critique is today possible as the critique of language.”²⁴ Both interpretation and critique form the dialectical struggle, a constant revaluation of conceptual ability. “Philosophy’s survival, therefore, profoundly depends on this awareness, its new task is its very own self-reflection—the reflection of the non-conceptuality of objects.”²⁵ The pathology of Filipino philosophy is its reification. Rather than just a nomenclature of the dialectic, it has taken over the discourse:

If we forget the fact that the word “Filipino” is simply a marker that tells us that a person belongs to a political and geographic area of the Philippines, then we will commit the grave mistake of inventing an illusion of unity of some sorts

²² Theodor W. Adorno, *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 31, cited in Bolaños, “The Promise of the Non-Identical: Adorno’s Revaluation of the Language of Philosophy,” 158.

²³ Theodor W. Adorno, “Why Still Philosophy?,” in *Critical Models: Interventions Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

²⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher,” in *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, ed. by D.A. Burke et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 9, quoted in Bolaños, “The Promise of the Non-Identical,” 157.

²⁵ Bolaños, “The Promise of the Non-Identical,” 162.

that may be manipulated for whatever political, economical, and ideological end.²⁶

To speak of a Filipino Philosophy is to understand the pathologies related to freedom: “before *realizing* Freedom, the Slave imagines a series of ideologies, by which he seeks to justify himself, to justify his slavery, to reconcile the *ideal* of Freedom with the fact of Slavery.”²⁷ What is realized is the solipstic movement in the Filipino consciousness. We cannot simply speak of it and expect everything to follow through.²⁸ A fixation on the nationalistic tendency provides rather an ideological perlocutionary effect; a fixation for a solitary unity, binding thinkers of same origin—simply rendered as a consciousness—takes form of a pathological necessity resulting in a decadent rationality.

In short, were the German philosophers really – philosophical *Germans*? ... that consciousness (*Bewußtheit*) is merely an *accidens* of the power of representation (*Vorstellung*) and not its necessary and essential attribute; so that what we call consciousness (*Bewußtsein*) constitutes

²⁶ Roland Theuas DS. Pada, “The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy,” in *Kritike*, 8: 1 (June 2014), 28, <http://www.kritike.org/journal/issue_14/pada_june2014.pdf>.

²⁷ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 53, as cited in Paolo A. Bolaños, “Hegel and the Pathologies of Freedom,” in *Cogito: Journal of Philosophy*, IV: 1 (2006), 38, <https://www.academia.edu/12010418/Hegel_and_the_Pathologies_of_Freedom>. I wish to further elaborate on this point but due to constraint in this present essay, I present the dialectic movement of Filipino philosophy in the primal position of the Slave convinced of his slavery and even justifies it. In this case the Filipino philosopher convinces himself of his need to speak of Filipino philosopher.

²⁸ There are numerous ethnic groups, regional appropriations, religious convictions, and even class dominances that take precedence prior to a communal Filipino mentality. Lest I fall into the same mistake of giving definite postulations, I rather suggest that a “Filipino consciousness” is amalgamation of multiple, diverse consciousness that are at play with each other.

only one state of our spiritual and psychic world (perhaps a sick state) and *by no means the whole of it*.²⁹

Consciousness is important for philosophy being the foundational aspect of one's way of thinking—but it is not the final say. “The ideal must defer to the idealization. ... It creates an autonomous collective entity, ‘German’, whose characteristics are then to be determined.”³⁰ Consciousness serves as a representation (in this case a *misrepresentation*) but not the entirety. It is not a dominance that makes a unitary development of ideas but a hegemony over variations. It is not a list of characteristics that people who fail to manifest these appropriations are to a lesser degree part of such consciousness. “A realistic perspective is to look at the notion of shared experiences and concerns that cover the Philippines and the Filipinos in their entirety.”³¹ The unitary idea of who the Filipino is must encompass these differences, and not an imposition of a fixed structure or a reified structure.

Fifth assumption: The “Filipino” is reified in this misrepresentation.

SIX

Filipino philosophy is a necessary illusion because it is the brand of the dialectic – but the illusion has usurped the truth. In this case the “disenchantment of the concept is the antidote of philosophy.”³² The value that is given to Filipino philosophy, in terms of compilation and presentation of facts, already has surpassed tangibility and now reflects the

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. by Bernard Williams, trans. by Josefine Nauckhoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), §357. Italics remained.

³⁰ Adorno, “On the Question: ‘What is German?’,” in *Critical Models: Interventions Catchwords*.

³¹ Pada, “The Methodological Problems of Filipino Philosophy,” 28.

³² Theodor W. Adorno, “Introduction,” in *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum Press, 1998), 13.

identity of the philosopher and his philosophy, reason's appropriation of nature, which is a pathology to the free course of thought: the twilight of rationality. This freedom in thought must create the semblance of unity and the perlocutionary force in turn makes us create value ourselves. "Language is seen to be nonrepresentational in the sense that it is prefigured by a multiplicity of shifting and malleable contexts."³³ New directions in philosophy must spring from this context of the pliability of the language of Filipino philosophy rather than a stagnation of identification of a solitary unity. This illusion must be interpreted anew. "Philosophy should not be afraid of borrowing theories and concepts from other nations, as long as such borrowings are done reflectively and as long as such borrowings are applied as paradigms and methodologies,"³⁴ and also in mythologization. What I take as a mythologization is to confer between descriptive and evaluative conceptions to do away with inherent pathologies for a continual plasticization of philosophical concepts.

Praxis also entails the philosopher's task of linguistic reconfiguration, based not only on what he inherits from the philosophical tradition itself, but from historical contingencies as well. In other words, praxis should open itself to the non-identical and should refuse any ontologization or reification of the non-identical.³⁵

We need to disenchant ourselves from the ontological dominance of such philosophy. Through a constant question and re-appropriation of meaning and language can new directions for Filipino philosophy flourish.

³³ Bolaños, "The Promise of the Non-Identical," 164.

³⁴ F.P.A. Demeterio III, "Re-Reading Emerita Quito's Thoughts Concerning the Underdevelopment of Filipino Philosophy," in *Diwatao*, 1: 1 (2001), <http://www.geocities.ws/philodept/diwatao/emerita_quito.htm>.

³⁵ Bolaños, "The Promise of the Non-Identical," 164.

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