

RESPONSES
What is Filipino philosophy?

On snow and the Filipino mind*

Leonardo N. Mercado†

Being is the core of Western philosophy. We see this centrality, for instance, in scholastic philosophy and in existentialism.

Since language mirrors thought, philosophies also reflect the languages on which they are based. When Aristotle wrote his *Categories*,¹ he was actually reflecting the Greek parts of speech. In general, the structure of sentences in Western languages can be simplified to having a subject and a predicate linked by the verb ‘to be’.

Language is the house of philosophy. If Being is most important in Western philosophies, should it also be the concern of Filipino philosophy? An analogy may clarify the question.

Because temperate countries experience plenty of snow, people there have made it a major part of their culture. Their agricultural practices and way of life have been accommodated to the eventuality of winter. They have words to depict the various states of snow and weather: their homes are designed to cope with snow; they have winter sports and other things connected with a snow culture. In

* This is an edited extract of Leonardo N. Mercado, Chapter 5, ‘The Counterpart of Being’, in *The Filipino Mind Philippine Philosophical Studies II* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 85, 87, 89, 90. It is reproduced with the gracious permission of the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

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countries with four seasons, languages are tense-oriented. English, for instance, has a dozen tenses.²

On the other hand, Filipinos do not have snow. So, why should they be concerned with snow? Filipinos naturally are more concerned with other meaningful aspects of the weather that affect their lives. Because Filipinos have no snow, they have no original word for it. But they have quite a vocabulary for things like rice in all its states, that is from the seed to its planting, harvesting, and cooking stage. Because the two seasons in the Philippines are basically *tag-init* (hot season) and *tag-ulan* (rainy season), tenses in Philippine languages are not stressed.³ We shall return to this point later.

Language therefore mirrors the concerns of life, and consequently mirrors a people's worldview or philosophy. Hence, Filipino philosophers primarily concerned with Being are like Filipinos concerned with snow!

The epistemological consequence is that English and other Western languages tend to judge things as *either/or*. A Filipino tends to think *both/and*, which mentality suits his concern for harmony. He shares this logic with his Asian neighbours.⁴

The *either/or* mentality leads to universal and cultural imperialism because of its zeal to reduce truth to essences. Truth for its own sake, even at the sacrifice of persons, is the goal of *either/or* thinking. We can therefore understand why Church history in the West has been marked by wars and persecutions for the sake of orthodoxy.

On the other hand, the *both/and* mentality leads to respecting pluralism. For the Filipino, truth must not be sacrificed out of respect for other persons, but harmony is a higher value than truth. Truth is not just conformity between the mind and the object.

Comparative Asian philosophy is important because it provides insights into Filipino philosophy. In the metaphor of family resemblance, not all the members of the family look the same because the totality of traits are, so to speak, not in every individual. Thus, Chinese and Indian philosophies are different, but they have a family resemblance.

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Taoism, which stresses the harmony of the yin and yang principles, is actually a philosophy of Becoming. The Chinese language, like the Philippine languages, also does not have the verb ‘to be’. Yet, Chinese philosophy can go deep in its speculations.

While Filipino philosophy has some features common to yin-yang philosophy, there are also differences.⁵

From the foregoing evidence, we can therefore conclude that the counterpart of Being in Filipino philosophy is Becoming.

We said above that Being is the core of Western philosophy, partly because of the structure of the Western languages. In the history of Western philosophy, ‘in most, though not in all, philosophical systems Being was given prominence while Becoming was placed in an inferior and subordinate role.’⁶ That is why, beginning with Plato, ideas came to be the most important concern: idea was translated to Being. In the history of Western thought, ideas were considered as eternal. Thus, scholastic philosophy was concerned with eternal truths.

If Becoming is a major concern of Filipino philosophy, does this mean a neglect of Being? Before we can answer the question, first a short digression.

The idea of the holy has two dimensions: the transcendent and the immanent. Western thought is concerned with the holy as transcendent, but Filipinos prefer to view the holy as immanent.⁷ Since the model preferred depends upon the culture, those who uphold one should not impose theirs on others.

Likewise, the law has two sides: right and duty. Western thought gives more importance to right because it values the individual more.

On the other hand, the Filipino preference for the immanent over the transcendent, duty over right, also has its counterpart in the preference for Becoming over Being.

Notes

- 1 *Synkretic* – Aristotle, *The Categories*, transl. E. M. Edghill (Whitefish, Montana: Kessinger Publishing, 2004).
- 2 Leonardo N. Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1974), 108.
- 3 Mercado, *Elements of Filipino Philosophy*, 107-110.
- 4 Felix Wilfred, 'Dialogue Gasping for Breath? Towards New Frontiers in Interreligious Dialogue', *FABC Papers*, No. 49 (1987), 43-46.
- 5 See Leonardo N. Mercado, Chapter 6, 'Evil', in *The Filipino Mind Philippine Philosophical Studies II* (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1994), 93-105.
- 6 Milac Capek, 'Change', *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1967, II, 76.
- 7 Leonardo N. Mercado, 'Religious Models and Filipino Thought', *Solidarity*, No. 128 (October-December 1990): 21-23; see also Leonardo N. Mercado, *Inculturation and Filipino Theology* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992), 43-73.

North Sampalokese is better than Plato's Greek*

Roque J. Ferriols†

No one can create a Filipino or any other philosophy except by accident.

Zhuang Zhou did not try to develop a Chinese philosophy. He simply awoke to the Way within him and around him, tried to awaken even more, knew that what he lived could not be put into words—when all that can be said has been said, the most important thing cannot be said—yet felt compelled to say all that he could say. Hundreds of years later, what he said still lives and is called Chinese philosophy. He is surprised. It is the Way that matters to him, not the label.

What more German than Hegel or Nietzsche? Yet neither are in agonies to be Germanic. They are too fascinated by the striving to see [the truth], by the visions that occasionally break [over] them, to engage in dramatics about identity. At the beginning of *Discours de la méthode*, Descartes says half-proudly, half-apologetically, that he is writing it in French.¹ For the rest of the work, he simply philosoph-

* This is an edited extract of Roque J. Ferriols, S.J., 'A Memoir of Six Years', in *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3-4 (1974): 338-345. It is reproduced with the gracious permission of the publisher, Ateneo de Manila University.

† Roque J. Ferriols, S.J. (1924-2021) was a Jesuit priest and Ateneo de Manila professor who pioneered the teaching of philosophy in Filipino. He earned his PhD from Fordham University. He lived in Quezon City, the Philippines.

ises. No symptoms of an anguished thrust to Frenchness. He is too French for that.

When I try to philosophise in Filipino, it is with the intent to live and to help awaken other people into living. Each language is a way of being alive that is irreducible. No, Filipino is not my favourite language. But it is a good language.

[I have been asked,] 'How do you translate philosophical terms?' That is really no problem. Most English philosophical terms are really Latin words (*subjectivum, objectivum, intuitio, praedicatum*) somewhat mispronounced and misspelled (subjective, objective, intuition, predicate). Or Greek words similarly distorted (metaphysics). The Germans sometimes use Latin and Greek (*subjektiv, Metaphysik*) or create their own terms (*Mitzumachung*) or do both at the same time (*Objekt, Gegenstand*). We followed the German model.

But this question was not usually asked as a request for suggestions on how to proceed or for information on how we proceeded. Usually, it was asked rhetorically, as a way of saying: 'You cannot do this.' Sometimes so bitterly as to mean: 'You cannot do this to me.' Often the question was a cover for a presupposition that what English and Spanish are allowed to do cannot be allowed to Tagalog or any Filipino language. So, intuition is 'derived from' the Latin. Coffee and alcohol are 'derived from' the Arabic. But *sumbalilong*² is a 'corruption of' the Spanish, *istrok*³ is 'corrupted from' the English.

Another form this question took was: 'How do you say "being" in Filipino?' with a facial aha-this-shows-you-cannot-do-philosophy-in-Filipino expression. There are many ways of answering that question. One is: 'as inadequately as in English.' The English word 'being' does not really express the central deed of metaphysics. Another answer is: 'What philosopher have you in mind?' 'Being' in Bertrand Russell⁴ is a different word from 'being' in Heidegger.⁵

'Are you still doing it?' The questioner is usually an English-speaking academic, fifty to sixty years old. He is taken up with obvious facial preparations to assume a grief-stricken pose the moment he hears the, he hopes, inevitable 'No'. Chagrin as he hears 'Yes'.

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The asker feels threatened by this continuing effort to philosophise in Filipino.

The question proceeds from the hidden conviction of the asker that nothing profound has happened in any Filipino language, that translations of foreign terms are not mere ornaments or helps but the very life blood of Filipino thought. Can there be any depth, he asks, in a Filipino centre? The Lord save him from his own superciliousness. He himself cannot.

A little over half a hundred years ago—according to reliable hearsay—I saw first light on floor twelve of the Philippine General Hospital. Later, I saw more and more light in Sampalok.

Trying to make friends in the playground, I talked to my peers in something I thought was Tagalog and was laughed at.

In North Sampalok, nobody felt superior to you if you spoke with a different accent or mixed Ilocanisms⁶ with your Tagalog. Not three kilometres away, the little sons and daughters of the Tagalese⁷ were enforcing elitist norms. Slowly, I came to know that my language was not Tagalog but North Sampalokese.

Twenty-five years after I had left home, I was in Wao, Lanao del Sur. A man a little older than me called me by my name. After a few minutes of talking, I too could call him by his name. He was an old neighbour. ‘How did you know I was here?’ ‘I recognised you on the altar when you were saying Mass.’⁸ He had a farm in one of the *barrios*.⁹ He could not live in our old neighbourhood after it had become too dense. We talked in North Sampalokese.

In six years, one comes to know that, for human thinking, North Sampalokese is better than Plato’s Greek.

North Sampalokese is better than Plato's Greek

Notes

These notes are provided by Synkretic to clarify references and other details of interest.

- 1 'And if I write in French, which is the language of my country, in preference to Latin, which is that of my preceptors, it is because I expect that those who make use of their unprejudiced natural Reason will be better judges of my opinions than those who give heed to the writings of the ancients only,' he writes. See René Descartes, 'A Discourse on Method', in *French and English Philosophers: Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, Hobbes: The Five Foot Shelf of Classics*, Vol. XXXIV, Charles W. Eliot, ed. (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2009), 62.
- 2 *Sumbalilo(ng)* is the Tagalog word for 'sombbrero' and is derived from this masculine Spanish noun. See Pedro Serrano Laktaw, *Diccionario Tagálog-Hispano* (Manila: Santos y Bernal, Islas Filipinas, 1914), 1210.
- 3 *Istrok* is the Tagalog word for 'stroke' and is derived from this same English noun.
- 4 'The world of being is unchangeable, rigid, exact, delightful to the mathematician, the logician, the builder of metaphysical systems, and all who love perfection more than life.' Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 57.
- 5 'Philosophy is en route to the Being of being, that is, to being with respect to Being. [...] The Being of being rests in Beingness. But this—the *ousia* [Beingness]—Plato calls *idea* and Aristotle the *energeia* [actuality].' Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, transl. Jean T. Wilde and William Kluback (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1956), 55.
- 6 An *Ilocanism* is a word from the Ilocano language used in Tagalog, much as *tête-à-tête* is a Frenchism in English.
- 7 An adjectival noun here relating to the Tagalog people, and more generally to the Filipino people in archaic usage.
- 8 His neighbour is referring to the fact that Father Ferriols, a Jesuit priest, had celebrated a Catholic religious service.
- 9 *Barrios*, a Spanish word that is itself an Arabism, are urban or municipal districts, often on the outskirts of a town.

Filipino logic*

Florentino T. Timbreza†

In the 1960s and 1970s, no Filipino teacher of philosophy would ever have believed there to be such a thing as Filipino philosophy. At the time, Western thought was the only acceptable one.

But if philosophy begins in wonder as Plato and Aristotle claimed, then there is a Filipino philosophy, insofar as Filipinos also marvel at the mystery of existence. ‘All human beings by nature desire to know,’ as Aristotle famously observed.¹ The Greeks do not have a monopoly on the desire to know.

If philosophy arises out of human experience, as the existentialist and phenomenologist teach, then there is a Filipino philosophy inasmuch as there is a distinctly Filipino experience.

And if philosophy is found in every culture, as the sociologist and anthropologist have discovered, then there is a Filipino philosophy, since the Filipinos have a culture as rich as that of any people.

If, finally, thought and language are intertwined, with the latter embodying the former, as linguists and philosophers of language suggest, then Filipino philosophy exists because there is also a

* This is an edited extract from Florentino T. Timbreza’s *Filipino Philosophy Today* (Mandaluyong City: National Book Store, 2008), xi-xxv, 187-191. It is reprinted with the gracious permission of Dr Florentino T. Timbreza.

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Filipino language—and in fact over 80 varieties of it, each of which reflects a different facet of human reality.

Our ability to philosophise, therefore, does not depend on our being Chinese, Greek, Indian, German, French, or Filipino. We do not need to become Westerners, nor speak English or French, to be awed by the mystery of life. It is enough to be born human with an indigenous experience, inherent culture, and a native language.

Filipinos, too, have their own philosophical worldview, a picture of reality which provides a plausible explanation of human life. Filipino thought is more of a philosophy of life than a philosophy of being, just as it was for the Greeks. It's still too young to have a metaphysics of its own, although Fr. Ferriols' concepts of *meron* (being), *wala* (nonbeing), and *pagmemeron* (becoming) have taken initial steps in this direction.²

Filipinos have not devised a system of definition. Instead, they tend to use metaphors, analogies, and similes. It is the scholar's arduous task to assemble these fragments of a philosophy of life into a coherent whole.

Some sinologists suggest that Confucius himself referred to his *Lunyu*, also known as *The Analects of Confucius*, as being based on a collection of wise sayings by the Chinese people's ancestors.³ There is no reason that we cannot do the same thing with the corpus of Filipino myths, parables, legends, proverbs, and sayings we inherited from our own forebears.

Who else could articulate a Filipino philosophy if not the Filipinos themselves? It would be the high point of irony to leave this task to foreigners.

If the Western syllogism is taken as the norm, then Filipino logic is identical with it in its theoretical form. Yet, the latter is *distinct* and *unique* on account of six core differences. Unlike its abstract, impersonal, universal, and scientific Western cousin, Filipino logic is more metaphorical, concrete, personal, moralistic, rhetorical, and theological.

This can make Filipino reasoning seem faulty from the stance of Western logic. Fallacies of false premises or false cause are often committed. People are prone to jumping to conclusions, indulging

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in pure speculative arguments, taking items out of context, and assuming premises without proof.

However, Filipino logic should be understood in the context of the people's mental framework. Western thought is logical and empirical. Every statement is supported by facts. Every conclusion should logically follow from its premises. Every pronouncement must be backed by proof. Every utterance must be verifiable and observable. Filipino thinking, on the other hand, is nonlogical and nonempirical. It is more intuitive than sequential, more functional than empirical, more practical than inferential.

The Filipino does not need to prove his statements. He does not need to define his terms; he does not need to justify his thought. He directly intuits the truth of statements. He seems to immediately apprehend knowledge of a practical kind about the nature of life, human nature, the world, etc. We see this, for instance, in the penetrating wisdom of the popular proverb, *Ang taong nagigipit, kahit sa patalim ay kakapit*, which means: 'A man who is in danger will cling even to a knife.' While it may formally prove nothing, its truth is obvious to anyone who has experienced all-consuming fear, loss, or despair.

Because we, Filipinos, have developed an indigenous philosophy and logic, it's important that we philosophise with it, and not with that of other races. Thinking with another's thoughts is like eating pre-chewed food. When we think through another's thoughts, we become subconsciously subservient to their owner. This is one of the reasons many Filipinos still have a colonial mentality.

Until when shall we remain prisoners of other people's thoughts? Why should we not articulate our own? If not now, when?

Reflecting on our culture and language can help us discern our philosophy of life, our values, and our Filipino identity.

Notes

These notes are provided by Synkretic to clarify references and other details of interest.

- 1 This the first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, here based on W.D. Ross' translation: 'All men by nature desire to know.' See Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, transl. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 980.
- 2 See, for example, Nemesio S. Que and Augustin Martin G. Rodriguez, eds., *Pagdiriwang Sa Meron: A Festival of Thought Celebrating Fr. Roque J. Ferriols, S.J.* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1997).
- 3 See, relatedly, Daniel E. Bell's suggestion that 'a strain of Chinese wisdom [was] preserved in the "Confucian" Classics'. Bell, *Confucian Political Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 89.

Philosophy must transcend man*

Claro R. Ceniza[†]

Some students regard philosophy as the most irrelevant of subjects. This is probably so because the ideas we teach them are foreign ideas which are alien to our Filipino experience.

One prevalent theory for this general feeling of the irrelevance of philosophy to our practical lives is that, in the over two thousand years that men have philosophised, philosophers have not agreed on any definitive answers to the philosophical questions. There appear to be as many answers to the questions as there are philosophers who have proposed answers to them. Hence, to many a common man, philosophy seems to be an exercise in futility. I do not agree with this thesis.

Many of the original problems of philosophy have in fact already been answered—or the way to their answers has in fact already been given. Note that the ancients asked themselves, ‘What is the world made of?’, and gave various answers to this question.

* This is an edited excerpt from Claro R. Ceniza, ‘Self-Identity and the Filipino Philosophy’, in *Sophia*, Vol. XII, No. 1, May-August 1982, Trimestral Journal of the Department of Philosophy, De La Salle University, Manila, the Philippines, pp. 22-25. It is based on a lecture delivered at a De La Salle University Philosophy Week Celebration between 15-19 March 1982. It is reproduced with the gracious permission of the Claro Rafols Ceniza Estate.

† Claro R. Ceniza (1927-2001) was a Full Professor at De La Salle University and a leading metaphysician, logician and philosopher of science. Dr Ceniza earned a PhD from Syracuse University. He lived in Manila, the Philippines.

‘Water’, said Thales.¹ ‘The Boundless’, said Anaximander.² ‘Fire’, according to Heraclitus.³ ‘The atoms and the void’, answered Leucippus and Democritus.⁴ And yet today, almost all—if not all—physics textbooks are in agreement as to the ultimate, or at least the penultimate, constituents of matter.

But it may be remarked that it was physics, not philosophy, which answered that question. In reply, we can only say that, formerly, physics was a branch of philosophy. It was then called natural philosophy. It just happens that when a philosophical problem is answered—or nearly answered—it ceases to be a philosophical problem. The discipline is taken over by a new-born science.

Who now thinks that the sun, the stars, and the planets are carried in their heavenly courses by intelligences? Science tells us it is gravity—or some curvature in the Space-Time continuum—that is responsible for the motions of the heavenly bodies. People once thought that diseases were caused by demons and angry spirits. Today, practically everyone believes that they are caused by germs or other physical malfunctioning. It used to be thought that earthquakes were caused by giant animals moving under the earth. Now we know they are caused by movements of the earth’s crust. Storms and lightning, as well as wars and pestilences, used to be blamed on the gods. Today, we are wont to explain them in terms of natural causes. The question of the origin of man has been answered to the satisfaction of most scientists and philosophers as due to the mechanism of evolution theorised by Darwin,⁵ Mendel,⁶ and others.

Even the beginning of the universe is no longer regarded as unanswerable in principle and the consensus among scientists and philosophers appears to be that the world did not begin according to the literal account given by the first chapters of Genesis.⁷ Much of the human psyche and man’s consequent behaviour have been explained and mapped by psychology, and a great deal of our social behaviour has been clarified by sociology.

The problem of the nature of Space and Time and their relation to the physical world have been greatly enlightened by the General Theory of Relativity, which, incidentally, I believe decisively—that

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is, as decisively as is possible at this point, at any rate—answers the question of whether the world is mind-dependent or possesses a reality outside of the perceiving mind; whether causal laws are happenstances, as Hume claimed,⁸ or proceed from a category of the mind, as Kant believed,⁹ or are due to the geometrical structure of Space-Time as Relativity itself suggests,¹⁰ and are, therefore, objective.

Philosophy is relevant and not a waste of time provided we take care to make it relevant to the student's personal concerns. There has to be a balance between objective lessons and student response. We must allow the students some leeway for discussions, even if we disagree with the opinions they express. We must, if possible, situate the lessons and examples in terms of the students' personal experiences—especially their experiences as Filipinos.

Nevertheless, a national philosophy must not be the ultimate goal of Filipino philosophising. We must graduate from nationalism to a more global approach. The next great step is humanism: to think from the viewpoint of humanity. We should no longer think merely as Filipinos, as Frenchmen, Germans, or Americans. But, although this is important, this also cannot be the sole purpose of philosophy.

For philosophy must also transcend the exclusive concentration on man. Philosophy must still step forward and, I think, throw its light on being itself. Being is Plato's Form of the Good which, like the sun,¹¹ enlightens all things and gives us understanding of all around us.

This, I think, is the course that Filipino philosophy ought to take.

Notes

These notes are provided by Synkretic to clarify references, and other details of interest.

- 1 Aristotle writes that, on the question of the nature or principle from which all others spring, ‘Thales, the founder of this kind of philosophy, says that it is water (that is why he declares that the earth rests on water).’ Aristotle, *The Works of Aristotle*, transl. W.D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 983b6.
- 2 Anaximander speculated that the origin of the world ‘has its source in the boundless (*apeiron*), literally, “without limits”.’ Robin Waterfield, ed., *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 5.
- 3 Heraclitus theorised that, through no act of man or the gods, ‘*all things become fire at one time or another [...] it ever was and is and will be: ever-living fire, kindling in measures and being extinguished in measures.*’ Cited in Aryeh Finkelberg, *Heraclitus and Thales’ Conceptual Scheme: A Historical Study* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2017), 65.
- 4 Leucippus was the first philosopher to speculate on the existence of atoms. His theory also presupposed a void in the universe, which later inspired Newton. Leucippus’ student Democritus developed his materialistic model of the universe. See Bernard Pullman, *The Atom in the History of Human Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 31-32.
- 5 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species: By Means of Natural Selection*, eds. Mary Carolyn Waldrep, Thomas Crawford (Mineola, New York: Dover, 2006).
- 6 Gregor Mendel, *Experiments in Plant Hybridisation* (New York: Cosimo, 2008).
- 7 Genesis 1:1-2:3.
- 8 For an introduction to David Hume’s theory of causation, see C.M. Lorkowski, ‘David Hume: Causation’, *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at: <<https://iep.utm.edu/hume-cau/>>.
- 9 For a comparison between Kantian and Humean theories of causality, see Graciela De Pierris and Michael Friedman, ‘Kant and Hume on Causality’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Winter 2018 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available at: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/kant-hume-causality/>>.
- 10 See, among others, James J. Callahan, *The Geometry of Spacetime: An Introduction to Special and General Relativity* (New York: Springer, 2013).
- 11 Ceniza is alluding to the famous analogy of the sun in *The Republic*, which Plato uses to explain the Good. See Plato, *Plato in Twelve Volumes*, Vols. 5 & 6, transl. Paul Shorey (London, William Heinemann Ltd., 1969), 507b–509c.

The Philippines' greatest female philosopher*

Anne Quito†

At 12:40am on 17 September 2017, Emerita Quito,¹ one of the Philippines' greatest philosophers, finally got her wish.² The 88-year-old former De La Salle University dean and author of more than 20 books died of respiratory failure in Manila. She was a trail-blazing scholar, a prolific writer, and a sought-after lecturer. She was also my grand aunt.

Once at the apex of Asian philosophy circles, Quito passed away in near obscurity, quietly whiling away her last years watching reruns of her favourite French game show, *Des chiffres et des lettres*. 'I have one prayer to God when I wake up every morning: Take me. I'm ready,' she said when I last visited her in June 2016. 'I don't only feel old,' she told me without a hint of nostalgia, 'I feel ancient.'

Quito dedicated her life to the realm of ideas. Educated at the Université de Fribourg in Switzerland and the Sorbonne in Paris, she garnered the *Chevalier dans l'Ordre des Palmes Académiques*, France's highest academic decoration in 1984. She was honoured as the Philippines' most outstanding educator a year later. She mastered six languages (including Urdu) and was a superb writer who chewed, challenged and interpreted Western philosophy for

* This edited extract of a piece first published in *Quartz* on 18 September 2017 is reprinted with permission.

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the Asian context with great insight and precision. Her 1969 dissertation, *The Notion of Participatory Freedom in the Philosophy of Louis Lavelle*, was the first work by a Filipino that the Université de Fribourg published.

Philosophy isn't very popular in the Philippines. Culture usually means pop culture there—Beyoncé will trump Barthes any day. Philosophy is even linguistically associated with foolishness in the national language. 'On the popular or grassroots level, the term "*philosopo*" (Filipino word for "philosopher") is a pejorative name for anyone who argues lengthily, whether rightly or wrongly,' as Quito wrote in a 1983 essay analysing the Filipinos' cultural aversion to rigorous thinking.³

Perhaps that is why one of the Philippines' most decorated intellectuals—and mould-breaking female professionals—never gained a larger following outside the classroom. Or maybe it was because she was an uncompromising personality who refused to preen for the celebrity-obsessed media.

Quito rarely broke out of her serious, no-nonsense demeanour while on campus. She wore an ascetic's uniform for years—straight black skirt and simple, short-sleeved blouse—recalling the nun's habit she wore as Sister Mary Paul when she briefly joined the Catholic convent of Assumption Sisters in Paris.

Quito's students remember her as a brilliant but stern scholar who had no tolerance for laziness. 'We were afraid of her. But we wanted to like her. So we tried. All we needed to do was read around 2,000 books,' says her former student, Milette Zamora. 'She never really gave us the answers, she made us get them on our own,' she recalls.

'She has no patience for bullshit,' adds Laureen Velasco, another of Quito's students. 'She would have made a very bad politician.'

Her former secretary Gabi Bongales recalls how popular her classes were despite her reputation. '[Students knew that] if Dr Quito gave them a failing grade, they deserved it, so no one complained.'

Those who breached Quito's stern veneer saw her generous and nurturing side. 'I was struck by her sincere professional interest in

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my work in creative writing and my feminist advocacy to expose and eradicate insidious practices of sexism,' recalls fellow De La Salle University professor Marjorie Evasco-Pernia.

Among my fondest memories of Lola Emy, as we called her, is of sitting on her chequered living room floor for French language lessons with my cousins. Fresh from a trip from Paris, she rewarded each child who managed to twist their tongue to utter a perfect *bonjour* or *croissant*. The prize that day was a retractable ballpoint pen printed with the words *je ne suis pas un stylo*. It was an existential joke, my dad later explained. I cherished the gag gift from my usually impassive grand aunt.

After she retired at age 59, Lola Emy continued to travel and give occasional lectures abroad. She collected paintings and lived on the royalties of her books. The last time we were together, I watched her divide her money among her nephews and nieces, gleefully distributing banknotes like cards from a deck. Never married and with no children, she was determined to give it all away before she died.

Unsentimental till the end, she refused a wake and asked to be cremated right away.

Late in her career, she was consumed by the task of defining philosophy for the masses. 'I grasped at Asian philosophy as a solution, like a drowning man would clutch a floating log in turbulent waters,' she wrote in her 1991 book *The Merging Philosophy of East & West*. 'I believe in giving Asia its due, and will try to express Asian thought in simple, lucid and readable terms, intelligible to anyone.'⁴

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Notes

- 1 Dr Emerita Quito's academic biography can be accessed on the De La Salle University website, available at: <<https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/university-fellows/dr-emerita-quito/>>.
- 2 For the full text, see Anne Quito, 'The Philippines' greatest female philosopher has died', *Quartz*, 18 September 2017, available at: <<https://qz.com/725370/emerita-quito-the-greatest-forgotten-filipino-philosopher-has-died/>>.
- 3 Emerita Quito, *The State of Philosophy in the Philippines* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1983), 9.
- 4 Quito, *The Merging Philosophy of East & West* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 1991), 3.

Abulad's postmodern reading of Kant

*Daryl Mendoza**

Arguably the premier Kantian scholar in the Philippines, Romualdo Abulad was highly regarded for his readings of Kant and particularly the *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹ Abulad's philosophical project of postmodernism should be viewed in this light.

Despite postmodernism being a watchword in Western intellectual circles from around the mid-1970s, it was not as well known in the Philippines until relatively recently. In 2000, Abulad inaugurated its reception with his programmatic essay, 'What is Postmodernism?'²

Prior to this, essays in the Philippines did not account for postmodernism's structure and genesis. Abulad's peculiar reading of postmodernism was influential in Filipino philosophical circles because he explained both. While many works on postmodernism set out from poststructuralism, Abulad began with an unusual source: Immanuel Kant. A 1998 essay already foreshadowed his philosophical trajectory:

Thus, it cannot be said that my interest in Postmodern Philosophy contradicts my ceaseless interest in Kantianism. On the contrary, there is a way to prove that the true direction of Kant's thinking ineluctably leads to insights which belong even to our own time. I shall, therefore, endeavor to integrate the two things which nowadays never cease to occupy me: Kant and Postmodernism.³

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Abulad's reading of Kant that I explicated takes the form of binaries. These should not be read as hypostasised concepts, but as strategic devices that guide without calcifying his thought.

The overarching strategic binary in Abulad's philosophy is that between the *via negativa* and *via positiva*, the negative and positive ways respectively. This device informs his reading of Kant and, crucially, his appropriation of it for understanding postmodernism.

Abulad's binary emphasises two important divisions in the *Critique*.

It first divides the *Critique* between its Transcendental Doctrine of Elements on the one hand, and the Transcendental Doctrine of Method on the other. It next demarcates the former along the lines of what can and cannot be known. In the *Critique*, the boundary between Kant's 'country of truth' and 'stormy ocean' falls at the end of the Transcendental Logic Analytic, before the Transcendental Logic Dialectic.⁴ Abulad considers the first general division of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as the *via negativa*, and as a necessary condition for the *via positiva* of the second general division. Similarly, he treated Kant's thesis on the knowable as his *via positiva*, and his thesis on what is unknowable as his *via negativa*.

Building on these divisions, Abulad's reading of Kant established two important premises in his thought.

The first premise was the importance of making a critique as radical as Kant's to wipe the slate clean and of building a new consciousness on this foundation. The second concerned the necessity of evaluating the faculty of reason to establish the limits of knowledge, which should inform action. Abulad would later apply these premises, drawn from his reading of Kant, to postmodernism.⁵

Paolo Bolaños observed that Abulad's essays tended to take readers with him on 'a journey back to the history of philosophy of his own peculiar telling, that is, his own philosophical *Denkbild*, often a fusion of horizons between the East and the West, but always Abulad's own constellation of concepts borrowed from the history of thought.'⁶

This 'peculiar telling' was the foam from which his theory of postmodernism arose. One also finds therein Abulad's two peculiar

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premises based on his binary of the *via negativa* and *via positiva*. Thus, Abulad replicated the structure of his reading of Kant in his reading of what he called postmodernism. That is, Abulad's account of postmodernism is also structured along the lines of the *via negativa* and *via positiva*.

Abulad's postmodernism sprouted from the rubble in the aftermath of Kant's devastating critique. In 2011, going beyond describing the German professor as its pioneer,⁷ Abulad finally presented Kant as the father of postmodernism, just as Descartes was the father of modern philosophy.⁸

Abulad's contributions to Filipino philosophy can be assessed using the conditions he set out in his own writings on this topic. It must be a conscious, original, authentically Filipino attempt at academic philosophy. 'Filipino philosophy is Filipino,' as he put it tersely.⁹

By his own criteria, Abulad's work on continental philosophy, his idiosyncratic reading of Kant's postmodernism, and his life-long commitment to his country mark him out as a distinguished Filipino philosopher. Born in the province of Quezon, Philippines, Romualdo E. Abulad was a teacher's teacher who taught at numerous universities over five decades and who never left his home country for opportunities abroad, even when these were offered to him.

Abulad was a teacher and mentor who saw in philosophy not only a profession or vocation, but a way of life. But if he has taught us anything, it is that even the example of his own philosophical method and conclusions should be purged completely and without reserve.

Notes

- 1 See Daryl Mendoza, 'Reading Abulad's Reading of Kant: Postmodernism and the Possibility of a Filipino Philosophy', in *Phavisminda Journal*, Special Issue, Vol. 18 (2019): 121.
- 2 Romualdo Abulad, 'What is Postmodernism?,' *Karunungan*, Vol. 17 (2000): 34-54.
- 3 Romualdo Abulad, 'Kant and Postmodernism', *Phavisminda Journal*, Vol. 2 (May 1998): 32.
- 4 See B295/A236-B324/A268, in Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, transl. Marcus Weigelt (London: Penguin, 2008), 251.
- 5 See Mendoza, 'Reading Abulad's Reading of Kant', 125.
- 6 Paolo Bolaños, 'Introduction to the Special Tribute Section: Abulad, Philosophy, and Intellectual Generosity', *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (December 2019): 7.
- 7 Romualdo Abulad, 'Contemporary Filipino Philosophy', in *Karunungan*, Vol. 5 (1988): 1-13; and Romualdo Abulad, 'Immanuel Kant as a Pioneer of Postmodernity', in *The Thomasian Philosopher*, Vol. 26 (2005): 120-128.
- 8 See Romualdo Abulad, 'Immanuel Kant as the Father of Postmodernity', *Zeferino Gonzales Quadricentennial Lecture Series*, UST Martyr's Hall, 19 February 2011. Unpublished; also quoted in Mendoza, 'Reading Abulad's Reading of Kant'.
- 9 See Romualdo Abulad, 'Options For a Filipino Philosophy', in *Karunungan*, Vol. 1 (1984): 17-30; Romualdo Abulad, 'Kant and Postmodernism'; Mendoza, 'Reading Abulad's Reading of Kant', 137-138.

How to outgrow Kant*

Rolando M. Gripaldo†

The early Filipino philosophers were Enlightenment thinkers in that they were influenced by the European Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment movement of the 18th century in Central Europe travelled to Spain in the first half of the 19th century and reached the Philippines in the second half of that century. José Rizal, who bought all the works of Voltaire, was an Enlightenment thinker.¹ He subscribed to the ideas of the Enlightenment: the dominance of *reason* with its capacity to emancipate mankind from its woes; the primacy of education as a tool for enlightenment; the inevitability of progress brought about by science and technology; the deistic belief that God created the universe with the laws of nature and left it perfectly working by itself, never to interfere with it again; the confidence that man can solve all his problems because these are humanly, not divinely, created; and the like.

It is a fact that there are Filipino philosophers. However, there are only a few of them. Most Filipinos engaged in philosophy are just *teachers* or *scholars* of philosophy. They have not yet graduated to become genuine philosophers. They master a philosopher—say,

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Immanuel Kant, St. Thomas Aquinas, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Plato—or they specialise in a branch of philosophy such as ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, or metaphysics. They try to learn a little of the other branches of philosophy to be able to relate those ideas to the ideas in their respective specialisations. In other cases, they simply do not read some schools or traditions of philosophy, which they consider either as not genuine philosophy or as too technical for their understanding to fathom, as in the philosophy of mathematics. But hardly if ever do they reflect or philosophise on their own.

To master a philosopher's philosophy or to master a field of specialisation within a discipline is good, but Filipinos need to grow either outside or within that philosopher or that specialisation. One ought not to be a Kantian forever, if by "Kantian" we mean we simply mouth Kant's ideas in our lectures and writings, that is to say, we do not innovate. We simply imitate Kant—we mimic his ideas and even probably also his mannerisms. We can quote or paraphrase from his three *Critiques*² cover to cover, know the ins and outs of his life, and so on. We become an intellectual through him.

Many of the Filipinos are like this Kantian. They become Nietzschean or Heideggerian or Rortyan through and through. They forget about their own independence of mind. They forget that they can innovate or tread a new path. Ralph Waldo Emerson teaches that one should be an independent intellectual because to imitate is suicide.³ If all that one wants in life is just to become a Kantian, or to mimic Kant, then in effect he or she is an *intellectual suicide*. Bertrand Russell and G.E. Moore were *young Hegelians*,⁴ but eventually they rejected Hegel and formulated their own individual philosophies. Plotinus studied Plato, but he did not end up just becoming a Platonist; he made a novel approach to Plato and became a neo-Platonist. It is said that Plato's immediate successor in the Academy was a Platonist,⁵ but, unlike Aristotle, he was easily forgotten or taken for granted in history.

In contemporary times, we can cite Alfred North Whitehead, who became a neo-Heraclitean by affirming the reality of the Heraclitean flux while employing the results of modern physics,⁶ and

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Claro R. Ceniza, who became a neo-Parmenidean when he tried to reconcile the views of Parmenides on *the One* and those of Heraclitus on *the Many*.⁷

Pythagoras—and many of the ancient Greeks—restudied the question that Thales earlier raised: ‘What is the universe made of?’ or ‘What is the ultimate reality?’, and independently offered a solution.

In short, we have at least three ways to become a genuine philosopher. We can: (1) innovate (from Kantian to neo-Kantian); (2) reject an old philosophical thought and create a new path to philosophising; and (3) review old philosophical questions and offer a new insight.

The Filipinos need also to recognise that any cultural setting is rooted in history. Culture over time is history. If they look back in their history, their philosophical beginnings and their developmental trajectory are influenced by a Western orientation. If we examine what is going on in philosophy in the Philippines today, it is basically Western in outlook with some occasional pockets of what is known as the Oriental outlook.

What is needed are philosophical innovations that are distinctively the product of profound philosophical minds, something that will separate one’s thoughts from the thoughts of others before him or her. And, I think, this is one of the great challenges of a would-be Filipino philosopher.

Notes

The text of note 5 is Dr Gripaldo's. All other notes are provided by Synkretic to clarify references and other details of interest.

- 1 José Rizal (1861-1896) is widely considered to be the Philippines' pre-eminent national hero. An influential novelist, political activist and revolutionary, he read Voltaire during his medical studies in Madrid. See Raul J. Bonoan, 'The Enlightenment, Deism, and Rizal', in *Philippine Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (First Quarter 1992): 53-67.
- 2 The *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), and *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790). Immanuel Kant, *Three Critiques: Three-Volume Set*, transl. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2002).
- 3 'There is a time in every man's education when he arrives at the conviction that envy is ignorance, that imitation is suicide...' Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Self-Reliance* (Morrisville, North Carolina: Logos Books, 2019), 9.
- 4 Morton White, *The Age of Analysis* (New York: Mentor Books, 1955), 13, 17.
- 5 Speusippus adhered to the philosophy of Plato. Though he rejected the world of Forms, he did not make a significant innovation in Plato's philosophy. See Diogenes Laërtius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, transl. Robert Drew Hicks, Volume 1, Book 4, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 374-379.
- 6 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, eds. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1929).
- 7 Claro R. Ceniza, *Thought, necessity and existence: Metaphysics and epistemology for lay philosophers: Written in the spirit of Parmenides of Elea* (Manila: De La Salle University Press, 2001).

Filipino philosophy?*

Noel S. Pariñas†

Inspired by Martin Heidegger's *What is Philosophy?*, the question 'what is Filipino philosophy?' entails the logical presumption that there is a Filipino philosophy. But is there really?

Undeniably, philosophy is fundamentally Greek. The Greek mathematician Pythagoras coined the term *philosophia* from the words *philos* or *philia* and *sophos* or *sophia*. Their nominal meanings are associated with "love, passion, or friend" and "wisdom" respectively. But it is not only by way of etymology that philosophy is said to be Greek, for the Western tradition claims that philosophy itself started in Greece. The father of philosophy, Socrates, was Greek and the first philosophers were Greeks.

The term 'Greek philosophy' is therefore a tautology.¹ It is tautological because philosophy is Greek by its very nature. For this reason, even 'Western philosophy' is practically redundant. As a necessary consequence, 'philosophy' implies that it is precisely Greek and Western. So, to speak of 'Western philosophy' or 'Greek philosophy' is to fall into the logic of redundancy. I will make use of wine as an analogy. By definition, 'wine' results from the fermentation of grapes. 'Grape wine', then, is a tautology.

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The word ‘logic’ was coined by a Greek thinker, Parmenides, from the Greek word *logos*, which may mean reason or discourse.² If philosophy is ‘love of wisdom’ and we search for wisdom using logic, then logic is the tool of every philosophical inquiry. Even the tool of philosophy is Greek. How is it possible to argue that there is non-Greek logic if logic originated in Greece and was systematically developed by a Greek thinker, Aristotle, who is regarded as the father of logic?³

This is the reason why Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, and all other Eastern philosophies are not acknowledged as legitimate philosophies—because they are non-Greek, that is non-Western. In short, to classify them as philosophies is an error. To classify certain products as ‘strawberry wine’, ‘rice wine’, etc., is similarly an error since ‘wine’ is the product of fermented grapes.

For these reasons, there can be no Filipino philosophy, properly speaking. How could there be a Filipino philosophy when, as Alfred North Whitehead famously concluded in *Process and Reality*, the ‘safest general characterization of philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato?’⁴

Still, some thinkers claim and insist that Filipino philosophy exists on the grounds that a philosophy is Filipino if the author’s language, citizenship, or categories are Filipino.

The first argument is problematic. Merely translating Plato’s texts from Greek to Filipino neither makes his philosophy Filipino, nor alters the identity of philosophy itself.

Secondly, the philosopher’s citizenship is not a sufficient condition either. I would not consider Plato’s philosophy Filipino even if, hypothetically, he became a naturalised Filipino citizen.

Lastly, it is even harder to establish a Filipino philosophy on the basis of the categories used. Which categories could be agreed to be authentically Filipino? Their claimed cultural purity would in most cases be highly dubious.

Despite the impossibility of there being a Filipino philosophy, there can still be Filipino philosophers. Although philosophy is Greek, we can distinguish a German from a French, American, or

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Filipino philosopher. Each uses their own vernacular to philosophise in originally Greek categories, so to speak.

A philosopher is not identified by their citizenship but by their nationality.⁵ Paulo Freire⁶ is a Brazilian philosopher because his nationality is Brazilian, even if he changed citizenship. Yet, we cannot say that Paulo Freire's philosophy is a, let alone the, Brazilian philosophy.

In like manner, we cannot generalise about German philosophy on the basis of Martin Heidegger's works. Nor do Jacques Derrida's books give us a privileged insight into something called French philosophy. Nationality, therefore, is prefixed to a philosopher's name not for the purposes of induction or generalisation, but of identification.

As Fr. Ranhilio Aquino argued, the idea of a purely Filipino philosophy is no less absurd than that of a British physics, a German mathematics, or a Greek geometry. If it 'is in the nature of science in fact to be no respecter of national boundaries,' as he asked, 'should that be less true of philosophy?'⁷

Who, then, is a Filipino philosopher?

One is said to be a Filipino philosopher if, despite the cultural Greekness of philosophy's methods, one is rooted to the Filipino historical experience. But because the discipline of philosophy is a system of references, rules, and standards imposed by the West, one is only crowned with the title of philosopher for playing its game.

Whenever we talk about Filipino philosophy, we are using the West's standards as a yardstick to measure and judge non-Western systems of thought.

Notes

- 1 Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* (Washington: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 1956), 109.
- 2 *Synkrētic* – See Robert Sherrick Brumbaugh, *The philosophers of Greece* (New York: SUNY Press, 1981), 50.
- 3 *Synkrētic* – For an introduction to Aristotle’s logic, a collection of works known as the *Organon*, see Robin Smith, ‘Aristotle’s Logic’, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), available at: <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/aristotle-logic/>>.
- 4 Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1969), 39.
- 5 ‘The philosopher must be a citizen of no country’. Michael Walzer quoting Ludwig Wittgenstein, ‘Philosophy and Democracy’, in *Political Theory*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (August 1981): 379.
- 6 *Synkrētic* – Paulo Freire was an influential philosopher of education who founded the critical pedagogy movement. See *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Penguin, 1985).
- 7 Fr. Ranhilio C. Aquino, ‘Filipino Philosophy?’, in *The Manila Times*, 19 June 2019, available at: <<https://bit.ly/3pu9VB7>>.