

EDITORIAL

Rethinking Reality: COVID-19 and Philosophical Reflections at the Edges

The theme of this issue is not intended to “just make” the Phavisminda Journal on track with the trends taken by many professional organizations. We know for a fact that almost all professional and academic societies and associations would like to say something about the COVID-19 pandemic. However, it is important not to fall into the temptation of trading critical and reflexive thinking with what is merely trendy and academically fashionable. This reminder becomes more necessary given what is oftentimes our inability to distinguish – on one hand – the act of philosophizing that stems from what is fundamentally human a character to inquire and – on the other hand – the effort to philosophize almost all things under the heat of the sun because it is pragmatic, utilitarian, and economically lucrative to do so. Consciousness of this situation is important considering the corporatization of the academe.

Precisely why a more intellectually honest point of departure for our inquiry is the question: aren’t our frustrations, fears, and anxieties in the here and now – rooted in our forgetfulness of the original human condition, which is [absolutely] unknown, uncertain, and therefore open? It is not even a question of “have we known” but more of “can we know” that which we call “reality” that serves as the foundation of all theories and propositions in religion, science, and politics, and has long been subject to philosophical investigation. Immanuel Kant, in his *Critique of Pure Reason*, tells us: “[w]hat things may be in themselves we do not know, nor need we care to know, because after all, a thing can never come before me otherwise than as an appearance.”

A further reminder to our readers: with this issue, the Phavisminda Journal does not aim to produce a solution, not even an ethical blueprint, to our problem. Finding a “solution” to COVID-19 is not the task of Philosophy. To insist on this is both presumptuous and hubristic. But

neither are we saying that the task of Philosophy is to fence-sit or add more problems. Rather the lover of wisdom takes the challenge of asking whether we have thought enough (or have we thought too much?) about the world and what we call life's "realities"? We borrow the words of Santiago Zabala for a truthful self-interrogation: "[c]an [Philosophy] 'the love for wisdom', as it is classically defined, make any difference in a pandemic?"

COVID-19 pushes us to our limits, and this, more than anything else, means the edges of our reason. Reality is not what we think of what it is. Kant was right when he spoke of reason's tendency to be "involved in darkness and contradictions." Reason which has been the most trusted power of humanity, has been put to test as the world and its said-to-be stable institutions continue to struggle in the face of the uncertainty and volatility of things. Isn't this the case with the ontology of our rites and rituals now put into question by an evolving virtual or online world? Isn't this the case with the "social contracts" between states and their people – now understood as nothing but a legal "fiction" gradually running out of moral or ethical foundation in the face of an increasing economic and political crises in some parts of the world?

Rethinking our assumptions and presumptions may not give us a solution. However, it allows us to keep things in perspective. In the end, it allows us to embrace what it means to live in this world – to be human.

In this issue are three (3) featured essays, three (3) contributed articles, and a short philosophical reflection. The featured essays are invited papers from either the members of our editorial or international advisory board. The contributed articles have been chosen from those who submitted their work for consideration.

We begin with Raymun Festin's essay that unfolds "at the intersection of three broad themes in Philosophy: *reality*, *history*, and *interpretation*. This work is Festin's second blast (the first was his critique of Romualdo Abulad's position on EJK) but this time addressed to those whom he calls historical revisionists, distortionists and contortionists. Arguing that, ultimately, reading history is grounded in one's reading of *reality*, Festin seriously challenges not only the political position of the

academics he has critiqued but also their very understanding of reality and thus the philosophy behind it. The article may not be directly about the COVID-19 pandemic but it presents an elaborate landscape of the current crisis in the Philippines which is worse than the virus: the divisions amongst Filipinos due to their political alignments, and their interpretation of ‘realities’ – political, historical, economic, etc. It is worth noting that a well-known Filipino jurist and one of our colleagues in PHAVISMINDA are mentioned as cases in point. Just an expression of curiosity: what would probably be – their rebuttal?

Another relevant material that may be used for social analysis especially under the current situation is Renante Pilapil’s essay on Hannah Arendt. It examines the philosopher’s “argument on thinking as a basis for moral judgement and action.” Pilapil invites us to further examine the relationship between “thinking” and “the problem of Evil.” Reading this systematically written work has made me wonder why there are publicly known intellectuals who continue to support local versions of totalitarianism. Indeed, this paper is a timely piece given the experiences of Evil in our own backyard.

Jeffry Ocay and co-author Allison Ladero offer a framework for reading the complex world of power-relations. Against the backdrop of Michel Foucault’s contention that “it is almost pointless to talk about subjects as active agents who can subvert the totalizing effects of power given that there can be no possibility of a logic of resistance outside of power”, the authors argue using de Certeau that “there is always a remainder in a subject’s general logic of power”, one that is “silent but transgressive.”

It has been years since the Phavisminda Journal has published an essay on anything about the Classics. Shierwin Cabunilas’ paper on Lucretius and Aurelius brings to the fore the enduring relevance and legacy of Classical Philosophy. Using the advices, admonitions, and reflections of Lucretius and Aurelius, about the plague in their time, our author offers his modest contribution: “Philosophy is instructive regarding anxiety and inner peace, responsibility, respect for political freedom, life in the present moment, and solidarity.” The author might not have thought of his work’s incidental contribution, which is the invitation for teachers and students of

philosophy to be grounded in Classical Philosophy, which many thought they have mastered.

Ben Carlo Atim's paper offers another reflexive approach to our crisis. Using Jean-Luc Marion's phenomenological reflection on sacrifice, Atim argues that "sacrifice, understood ethically, supports the necessary condition for a saintly and heroic act of supererogation." Saintly and heroic acts, explains Atim, are necessary and crucial in a society especially if and when its social fabric "is on the brink of danger due to fear, discord, and uncertainties and when the ineptness and senility of some political and bureaucratic leaders are threats that weaken political systems."

Enrique Fernando's paper is on Coherence Theory applied in the fields of Science and Law. At the core, Fernando argues that "coherence theories in science and law are prone to manipulation for various agenda." He then relates the insights of his analysis to controversies surrounding the interpretation of COVID-19-related data in the Philippines and the government's decision to procure twenty-five million doses of the Sinovac vaccine despite the lack of data pertaining to its safeness and efficacy. This work brings variation in our pieces in this volume, as its intellectual approach represents the Analytic tradition of Philosophy.

We are given a lighter reading in Paolo Bolaños' short philosophical reflection. He invites us to see the crisis brought about by the COVID-19 virus as one that is mainly biological and not political, thereby reducing us all into bare life. Deepening his philosophical exploration, Bolaños would like us to try the lenses of Gilles Deleuze: "the virus too is a manifestation of life—it is alive—even if from our own anthropological standpoint, it causes our demise."

A book review by Rhoderick John Abellanos is included. In focus is the compilation of essays of the Four Horsemen of Atheism and the transcript of their 2007 discussion. This material is not far from relevant, after all the pandemic has sparked more debates on the existence of God, the problem of evil, and the possibility of afterlife.

This editorial cannot miss to note the connections and locations of our contributors in this issue. Raymun Festin's connection with the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.) reminds us of the journal's roots. Dean Renante

Pilapil and Jeffry Oca represent both the Visayas and Mindanao – the geographic birthplace of PHAVISMINDA. Interestingly however, Shierwin Cabunilas, Ben Carlo Atim, and Enrique Benjamin Fernando III are all from outside Visayas and Mindanao. This can be interpreted to mean that the seeds planted by PHAVISMINDA have now grown in areas beyond its erstwhile territorial comfort zone. However, this also serves as an invitation to professors, teachers, and other academics trained in philosophy who are in the Visayas and Mindanao to contribute their ideas through the Phavisminda Journal, keeping in mind their commitment to Philosophy.

Finally, a word of gratitude to our colleagues in the discipline who generously gave their time to review the papers of our contributors. Truly, we are indebted to their invaluable support. Our reviewers who are legitimate heavyweights in their area/s of specialization are a testament to the fact that though the Phavisminda Journal has remained unaccredited or non-indexed, nevertheless its commitment to the discipline and its advancement is more in terms of “substance” rather than “form.”

We, further, take this opportunity to officially welcome and acknowledge the additional members of Phavisminda Journal’s International Advisory Board: Prof. Umberto Bresciani (Fu-jen University, Taiwan), Dr. Jacklyn Cleofas (Ateneo de Manila University), Prof. Jose Nandhikkara, C.M.F. (Dharmaran College, Bangalore, India), Prof. Anselm Ramelow, O.P. (Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology, California), and Prof. Przemyslaw Tacik (Jagiellonian University of Krakow, Poland).

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