

EDITORIAL

Endings and Beginnings: Thinking Philosophy through the Life and Legacy of Romualdo E. Abulad

Just before the end of 2019, we were informed of the passing of Brother Romualdo E. Abulad of the Society of the Divine Word. His departure signaled what we may aptly call ‘the beginning of the end of a generation.’ Abulad was a mentor to many, a man who lived most of his adult life dedicated to philosophy. As a Divine Word missionary, the study of the discipline was in no way different from his mission, and to the very end his vocation as a religious equated to teaching philosophy without the fear of compromising its method and content with the faith he professed. He mentored many of us, and we know that his guidance did not require total blind discipleship to his convictions. He had philosophical views especially in the later years of his life, which we know were not in agreement with ours particularly in the field of politics. But Abulad was who he was, a philosophy teacher who must be taken seriously whether you agree with him or not.

This special issue of the PHAVISMINDA Journal is dedicated to him. For some reasons this could not have been realized, but COVID-19 came and the boredom caused by the pandemic providentially brought to life this volume. By the time this would be released, the philosophical community in the country would also recall how 2020 witnessed and felt the loss of its older generation. In March of the same year, Quintin Terrenal, S.V.D. died. He was the founder of the Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao (PHAVISMINDA), and who had the honor of writing the *Introduction* of the very first issue of the PHAVISMINDA Journal in 1996. Two more figures in Philippine philosophy died in the same year: Josephine Pasricha and Leonardo Mercado, S.V.D. Both of them, like Abulad, taught in the University of Santo Tomas.

Precisely why at the onset I mentioned that Abulad’s death may be understood, in hindsight, as a signal of ‘the coming to an end of a generation.’

Some of his contemporaries are still with us but I believe it is not disrespectful to say that it is a matter of time when the next generation of academics in philosophy will soon have to take the fuller commitment to decisively shape the philosophical discourse in the Philippines. We shall get back to this in a later, as we shall for now, say some points about Abulad and the articles in this journal.

In this volume are two featured essays and four tribute-articles on Abulad or his works. Ryan Urbano's essay on Thomas Pogge's approach to global justice emphasizes the negative duty not to harm the global poor. A response to Rawls' liberal position on justice as fairness, the paper argues that an expanded and more inclusive conception of justice is critical because it underlies the proper design and framing of social and economic institutions. Jose Conrado Estafia's paper invites the readers to re-read and revisit a rather familiar but still unexhausted topic: Heidegger's question of the nothing (*das Nichts*). The heavily footnoted essay apparently tries to convince us to consider Edith Stein's reading of Heidegger. Estafia contends, and you may disagree with him, that the question of the nothing leads us to the question of the eternal foundation of finite being. To either accept or reject this requires a serious reading of Stein's commentary to the 1929 inaugural lecture of Heidegger at Freiburg University.

Four articles purposively written for Abulad follow the two Featured Essays. These works were presented during the *Sapere Aude mini-conference* that was organized in Abulad's honor. There were other papers presented during the said event but just like the gospels some did not make it to canonization. Rhoderick John Abellanosa's paper expresses dissatisfaction with Abulad's reading of Machiavelli and his treatment of the question: do philosophy and politics mix? According to Abellanosa, Abulad could have been more radical in answering his own question. The latter's failure to do so is what the former would take as a point of departure for his proposal to consider the possibility of a post-political choice or situation. Imbong's critical take on Abulad's post-Machiavelli at first appears to be of the same focus as Abellanosa's paper, but in the end, it is actually a critique of Abulad's apologetics for President Rodrigo Duterte. Purino's comparative reading of Kant's notion of duty and the Buddhist concept of dharma is presented within the context of her recognition of Abulad's scholarship that was no less an extensive

academic journey guided by Kantian philosophy. We end with Daryl Mendoza's reading of Abulad's reading of Kant. He explores the key themes in Abulad's writings specifically postmodernism and Filipino philosophy. Mendoza argues that despite the seeming diversity in themes and foci of Abulad's writings, they are a coherent and connected body of thought – all traceable to his “reading of Kant.”

The six works in this volume are in many ways connected to Abulad not just because they are dedicated to him but because their writers at some point crossed paths with their late mentor's intellectual journey. The contributors in this issue are not necessarily disciples of Abulad but surely they were fellow sojourners in the search for truth. Urbano, Estafia, and Purino were advised by Abulad in their doctoral dissertation; Mendoza and Imbong in their Master's thesis. Abellanosa was under Abulad in a number of courses when the latter was the chair of the Department of Philosophy in the University of San Carlos.

The works in this issue rekindle Abulad's contribution to philosophy in the Philippines. Amidst the ongoing discussions on the existence or possibility of Filipino philosophy, the Divine Word scholar's legacy is a testament to the fact that Filipinos can connect to the philosophical discourse in the wider global scale. His works continue to remind us that a genuine philosopher should be loyal, first and foremost, to the vocation of thinking, and only in a secondary sense to whatever and wherever his scholarship would take him.

In a generation where research and publication are measured in terms of citations and circulations or even popular approval in social media, Abulad reminds us that we need not force on others our relevance. In the many conversations I had with him, one line perhaps not as frequently repeated as his usual quotable phrases struck me one time: “if people believe in me, they will read me.” These words are a timely reminder especially within the current context of the academe where we are not only tempted but also pushed to seek relevance, though sometimes, and let's admit it, the drive to do so is artificial. It is a challenge not to give into the temptation of reducing philosophy to anything other than thinking about what it is supposed to think. The promises of ‘apparent relevance’ are enticing but the price is high. Philosophy is philosophy because it is not merely an

opinion, a newspaper commentary, or a lawyer's discourse. Don't get me wrong. These pieces can be philosophical and they may even be written by philosophers themselves. However, philosophy cannot and need not be equated most of the time to them, and a genuine philosopher need not compromise his commitment to rigor all in the name of public demand. This is not to say that philosophy is a specialist's language that cannot be translated to anything but ordinary. However, it is something that cannot sacrifice the importance of serious reflection in exchange for high approvals in social media or elsewhere.

We are not doing greater service to our immediate community in particular and to humanity in general if the trajectory of our philosophizing is relevance understood merely in pragmatic and utilitarian terms. It's not that philosophy is not relevant, rather its relevance need not be artificially portrayed. Precisely why the love of wisdom is not the pretension to know all the answers to all the questions in life. Philosophers cannot claim and neither should they claim to know the answers to all problems under the heat of the sun from democracy and terrorism to love and romance. And neither are all controversial more so political questions, automatically a philosopher's concern. Sometimes it is best for a philosopher to stay silent for a while step back and see if there is something that has yet to be said after a lot has been already said in this world of mess and turmoil. Our eagerness to rush as participants of a controversy even before we could see where the lacunae in thinking are, make us less of philosophers and more of ideologues, political tacticians and apologists of the State. We become trendy and popular but less reflective and allergic to criticism; we become part of the 'crowd.'

Philosophy need not 'justify itself' as Karl Jaspers once said and as Abulad loved to quote, because its questions are actually humanity's fundamental and original questions. Philosophy's questions are the questions of the fool, the children, the forgotten, and those who have lived long enough to see what a world is and what it cannot become without philosophical grounding. Formulating problems in the areas and quarters of daily life even if others do not see and feel the need to, is the more serious challenge of philosophy. We may not need to find the answer soon; sometimes the question is more important than the answer. The best philosophies left the world with problems to solve, one that invites the other

disciplines to continue discussing. This does not mean that our business is to dwell in the level of abstraction. Indeed, it is not just a practical but also a theoretical necessity for anyone who does philosophy to seriously communicate and engage with people from various walks of life. After all, it's from Kant that we learned that "thoughts without content are empty" and "intuitions without concepts are blind." But still we do not need to flex our importance.

A philosopher's relevance depends on the depth and power of his thoughts. But such depth and power are always proportionate to his philosophical convictions. Apparently this is not attractive a path especially for those who refuse to see that life's more essential things cannot but be part of a spontaneous process that must be allowed to gradually unfold in time. Philosophical thinking cannot develop overnight.

In light of the foregoing allow me to end with some words about the PHAVISMINDA Journal. Our journal is older than many other philosophical journals that were birthed by the technocratic demands of a market-based academia. Perhaps because it is relatively older than other contemporary philosophy or so-called "Interdisciplinary" journals that it has not been quick to adapt the demands and ways of twenty first century academic life. It is no secret that the journal is not yet accredited by Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and that it is not as publicized as the other online and open access journals. But there must be a reason for this. While there are many advantages if one gets into the system where citations and accreditations matter but, again let's face it, these can be alienating. They enable us to innovate the way we write but sometimes we run the risk of writing things which we really do not want to write about in the first place if not for the dictates of our university's research agenda.

Through the years the PHAVISMINDA journal has remained clear in its objective: to be a space of and for philosophical ideas even those that have been smirked for irrelevance. But we take refuge in what our founder, Fr. Quintin Terrenal, said decades ago, "[t]he blatant trap of lovers of wisdom consists in squandering their efforts and time on issues other than serious answers to fundamental questions."

A list of academics in and from the Visayas and Mindanao have been part of the journal's life from its founding members Quintin Terrenal, Amosa Velez, and Michael Moga to philosophy academics who later joined and became part of the association in one way or another: Rosario Manzanares-Espina, Florencio Lagura, Heinz Kulueke, Romualdo Abulad, Leonardo Estioko, Manuel Dy, Rolando Gripaldo, and Raymun Festin down to philosophy academics of the later generation: Eddie Babor, Ryan Urbano, Orlando Ali Mandane, Jeffry Ocay, and Ruby Suazo. It also published the papers of academics who may not be within the inner circle of PHAVISMINDA but have nonetheless contributed to the discourse of philosophy in the Visayas and Mindanao: Dennis Villarojo, Emmanuel Fernando and Santiago Sia. There are many others who have published in this journal; in the same degree and measure, their contributions are acknowledged.

Finally, we cannot close this editorial without our deepest and sincerest gratitude to the Department of Philosophy of the University of San Carlos which has partnered with the journal in its years of publication. In a very special way we thank Dr. Orlando Ali Mandane who served as the journal's editor after Virginia L. Jayme and, briefly, Florencio Lagura, S.V.D. His editorship was a labor of love, commitment, and dedication. We also extend our appreciation to Dr. Ruby Suazo who worked with Dr. Mandane, as Managing Editor of the journal and immediate past president of PHAVISMINDA.

As a tribute to Romualdo Abulad, let this editorial note end with some words from his favorite philosopher, Immanuel Kant, if only to remind us of what needs to be rekindled these days: "Dare to know (*Sapere aude*)! Have the courage to use your own understanding..."

Rhoderick John S. Abellanos
Editor-in-chief