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Reality, History, and Interpretation: A Historico-Philosophical Reading of Marcos's and Duterte's Narratives

Raymun Festin

Divine Word Generalate, Rome

rayfestin@yahoo.com

Abstract

This essay surveys the social and political landscapes of the Filipino nation. It examines the main two powerful stories of our time—the Marcos's and Duterte's narratives – from the historico-philosophical perspective. It argues that historical truth must be the primary criterion in appraising their respective legacies. For history which consists of past events is an impartial judge of human thoughts and actions. Historical events are independent and objective facts. They should serve as the reference point of historiography; although the historian's perception matters as well. In the metaphysics of history, truth lies *not* in the standpoint of the historian but in history itself. Certainly, the historian's interpretation and account cannot fully grasp the truth of history; but it should approach its threshold and satisfy its terms and conditions. Two conceptions of history are at play in the elucidation of the main theme: history *as what happened in the past*, and history *as what is happening now*. Both ideas of history fall under the broadest notion of all: *reality*.

Keywords: reality, history, interpretation, truth, Duterte, Marcos

Preliminary Remarks

This essay unfolds itself at the intersection of three broad themes in philosophy: *reality*, *history*, and *interpretation*. It attempts to plot and

triangulate them with a view to forming a unified perspective from which a socio-politico-philosophical reading of Philippine contemporary history will be conceived. Such an attempt presupposes that the three subjects of philosophical discourse coincide, overlap, and intertwine – which they actually do – in an open and reasoned discussion.

Obviously, of the three leitmotifs, the nature of *reality* is of capital importance, since it is, as Aristotle holds, philosophically identifiable – or, more precisely, synonymous – with the most absorbing notion of all: *Being* itself.

In truth, the question of *Being (reality)* is the most fundamental concern of general metaphysics¹ because it enjoys an “ontological priority.”²The elucidation of the notion and meaning of *reality* therefore forms the base of this trilateral exposition, upon which the two other concepts stand and fasten jointly as supporting planks.

This essay is actually not as ambitious or pretentious as it may seem. The ensuing discussions do not offer a comprehensive treatment of the subjects in question considering the extensiveness of their scopes and the limited space allotted to this paper. It only aims to plot some pertinent points of convergence between/among the three philosophical topics to appraise the recent past events and present exigencies obtaining in Philippine contemporary history.

Reality as the Fundamental Presupposition of Human Thought

It was René Descartes, France’s greatest philosopher, who ushered in the age of modern philosophy, of which he is justly regarded as its intellectual father. His quest for epistemic objectivity and certainty led him to the insight that the

¹ Aristotle *Metaphysics*, 993a30; 1003a20. See Aristotle, *Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 2, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983). Cf. R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Philosophical Method*, eds. James Connelly and Giuseppina D’Oro, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 123.

² Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (1962; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 31.

act of thinking is the ultimate ground on which the entire structure of human knowledge and all the sciences securely stands.

In the *Second Meditation*, Descartes introduces his most significant epistemological insight. There he argues that although some omnipotent Evil Genius may be deceiving me, there is one thing of which I am absolutely certain: that is, *I exist*.³ The assertion *I exist* is the bedrock of epistemic certainty.

But how can I be sure that *I exist*? Descartes' answer is: *I think*.⁴ Thus, *Cogito, ergo sum*.

There is a very subtle paradox involved in Descartes' argument that is, I cannot doubt my existence *without* existing while I doubt. This entails that I should *first* take for granted my existence *before* I can actually doubt anything at all. Put another way, I can assert that *I think* only if I presuppose that *I exist*.

The circularity obtains when Descartes argues that *I know* that *I exist* because *I think*. Descartes was aware of this paradox, of course. He knew that we have to take as **given** our existence in the world *before* we can engage in thinking, reasoning, arguing, and doubting. Taking for granted our existence is a curious act of presupposing which is intuitive by nature and necessity.

While Descartes' elucidation of his methodic doubt triggered the turn of philosophical thinking to the human subject as the *Cogito* – a turn that eventually led to the reign of reason or “the age of criticism”⁵ – it also proved that the ground of all forms of knowledge is the intuitive certitude – call it faith, if you will—that *I exist*, and that I am aware of my being conscious of my existence, which is something that I can neither doubt nor deny.

³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. and ed. John Cottingham, rev. ed. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1996), AT VII 25.

⁴ René Descartes, *Discourse on the Method*, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 1, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1985), AT, IV32.

⁵ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1987), 1.

St. Augustine was also mindful of this truth. In *On the Trinity*, he talks about the nature of the human mind. He holds that the human intellect “knows itself to be and to live in the way the understanding exists and lives.”⁶ For Augustine, this fact is incontrovertible. He further writes:

[For] who would doubt that he lives, remembers, understands, wills, thinks, knows, and judges? For even if he doubts, he lives; if he doubts, he remembers why he doubts; if he doubts, he understands that he doubts; if he doubts, he wishes to be certain; if he doubts, he thinks; if he doubts, he knows that he does not know; if he doubts, he judges that he ought not to consent rashly.⁷

The key point we wish to emphasize here is significant. Whenever the human subject is engaged in the act of thinking, it ineluctably takes as unquestionable *given* a web of interlocking presuppositions. These unspoken assumptions are undeniably self-evident that the light of *reason* rarely, if at all, shines on them, and that the human subject can only doubt them at the peril of entangling itself in the web of contradictions.

If Descartes really wanted to begin with an impeccable slate in epistemology, why did he *not* doubt the word *doubt* itself? The fact is, his methodic doubt could only make sense philosophically if, and only if, he left *la langue française* unquestioned.

The same thing is true for the external world. Since our existence is ontically and ontologically linked with that of the external world, the latter is also absolved from Cartesian doubt.

The *pregivenness* of *reality (Being)* is the bedrock of human thinking—the overarching background and foreground of all our thoughts, reflections, locutions, actions, transactions, investigations, and relations.

⁶ Augustine *On the Trinity*, ed. Gareth B. Matthews, trans. Stephen McKenna, in *Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Desmond M. Clarke (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 10. X. 13.

⁷ St. Augustine *On the Trinity*, 10. X. 14.

Our intuitive familiarity with *reality as such (Being)* is something we do not usually think and talk about in our everyday affairs. Even in our cognitive pursuits, we simply take *reality (Being)* for granted as the reference point of our research into the world around us. We neither doubt nor negate *reality (Being)* because it is the cornerstone that holds the entire house of *reason*.

History and Reality as Such (Being)

When we speak of *reality* as a catchall term in philosophy, we include in its signification not only the physical world and all it contains; not only the occurrences and conditions that characterize the domain of Nature; not only the *hanging-together-of-things* in the realm of human experience; not only the vicissitudes of fortune in the lives and affairs of individuals or groups of people; not only the logical beings conceived in the human mind—but also the events that took place in the past.

Events that transpired in the past are called historical facts; and by that we mean that such-and-such incidents factually happened in history. The historicity of a particular past event is sanctioned and validated by the science of historiography—with its systematic methods of research, analysis, and interpretation.

It is a historical fact, for instance, that EDSA Revolution took place in the Philippines in February 1986. Such an event is, irrefutably, an actuality in Philippine history. One can verify its historicity by perusing historical documents, watching video clips of its unfolding, and interviewing eyewitnesses.

The object of historical study is the past which consists of events that occurred in space and time. It is the office of the historian to enquire into what happened in human affairs and in the world of nature insofar as it affected the lives of people.

Historiography—or the epistemology of history—is a very curious branch of knowledge. For its object of study, the past, is no longer accessible to present observation and analysis.

The question is, since the past *is* no more, how can it be an object of knowing?

One distinct characteristic of science is that its object of investigation is available to the inquiring mind. The medical technologist, for example, conducts chemical examination and analysis of blood, urine, and other bodily fluids under the probing eye of the microscope. Without the specimens to work on, he cannot carry out the task of inductive analysis. And without the blood sample with which to undertake malarial smear test, he cannot determine whether or not the patient shivering with high fever is suffering from the ravages of malaria.

If science is distinguished by observability and certainty, does history—the object of which is the past which is no more—qualify to be considered as a systematic undertaking?

Historians point out that the object of historical knowing is what they call *evidence* gathered in the present—that is, the material remains of the unfolding of some past event. The ruins of an ancient temple, for example, constitute as evidence for an archaeologist or historiographer. But is it really possible to reconstruct the past out of the physical remnants, say, of a burial ground of the Mayas who lived two thousand years B.C.E.?

A historian may point out that it is impossible to recreate the past in its entirety. The content of any given historical reconstruction is always partial since any reenactment is circumscribed within the remit of evidentiary data and information. A historiographer does not attempt to provide us with the whole picture of the past, but only part of it.

Historians carry out their task with a given cluster of assumptions. The difference of standpoints will have an impact on the manner in which, for example, two competing historians investigate the unfolding of a particular episode in the past. It will not only determine how they evaluate the pieces of evidence at hand; it will also shape how they interpret them and, eventually, judge the meaning of an event.

The question of objectivity is therefore a fundamental concern in historiography. If a historical narrative eschews the claim of completeness or objectivity—since another account may contradict it from a different point of view—the legitimacy of history as a systematic study may be put to question.

There is also the issue about evidence. Are the historian's sources and testimonies trustworthy? How can a historian assure his readers that the integrity of his evidence is untouched? What criteria will a historian apply in evaluating his sources, so that he can proceed with the investigation with reason and propriety? And how does a historian persuade his readers that his reenacted history is impartial and truthful?

There is, finally, the question of historical reconstruction. After having established the integrity of his evidence, how does a historian reenact a past event and write an account of it? What method of interpretation should a historian employ to get hold of historical truth?

It is beyond the scope of this essay to elucidate the epistemological concerns with which a critico-scientific historian must grapple in writing an impartial historical narrative: the integrity of evidence, the demand of objectivity, and the question of interpretation.

It is not, however, unreasonable to assume that there *is* such a science called history in the body of human knowledge; and that, implicit in such an assumption, there is also a field in philosophy called philosophy of history. Having said that, we wish to propose in the next section one way of deciding whether or not a historical account neatly dovetails with historical truth.

Historical Truth and Historical Account

The question which we now address is: How does a particular historical narrative square with historical truth?

By historical truth we broadly refer to the fact (*factum*) that such-and-such event truly happened in the past, that such-and-such causes and conditions gave

rise to its unfolding, and that its actuality should serve as the determining factor in judging whether the historian's account is true or false.

We are not concerned now with the subject respecting the historian's point of view from which he considers past events, a concern which we shall deal with shortly. What concerns us now is to highlight one postulate in historiography—that is, a historian's perspective is, philosophically speaking, subordinate to the truth of historical events.

For, ultimately, the truth of *Being (reality)* is the foundation of all manner of truths; that is to say, *Being (reality)* is the ungrounded ground of all truth.⁸ This explains why in general metaphysics students are taught that truth (*veritas*) is the adequation between *Being* and the intellect (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*). But the reference point of this correspondence is always *Being* or things (facts).⁹

Let us start by introducing two senses of historical facts. This twofold sense is derivative of Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding of a state of affairs (*Sachverhalt*).¹⁰ In logic, a state of affairs means the *hanging-and-holding-of-things-together* or the manner in which things singly and jointly stand in relation to each other.

An example of a state of affairs is the specific arrangement of the plates, glasses, spoons, forks, and knives on the table. The pieces of cutlery are placed in such a way that each is spatially related not only to the other individual parts but also to the whole silverware.

The table setup portrays a state of affairs that can be described in words, phrases, and propositions. One may point out in a proposition that every knife is positioned on the right side of, and singly paired to every fork. One may further

⁸ See discussions in Martin Heidegger, "Postscript to 'What is Metaphysics?'" trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 231-38.

⁹ See discussions in Martin Heidegger, "On the Essence of Truth," trans. William McNeill, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 136-54.

¹⁰ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London: Routledge, 2002), §1.1; cf. §1.13, §2.01.

assert that the number of the forks is the same as the number of the knives on the table.

Another example is the position of the chess pieces on the squared board. Their internal relationships show the *hanging-togetherness* of *all* chess objects in an actual situation of the game.

Such general logical configuration *is* a fact.

The relation that holds between a particular chess piece and the square on which it stands – for instance, a knight’s move on the chessboard—*is* likewise a state of affairs. In chess notation, this specific fact (state of affairs) may be represented in this elementary proposition: K_nR_1 . Now, if the knight is actually positioned on that specific square, and if the atomic statement K_nR_1 faithfully depicts that state of affairs, then the description (K_nR_1) *is* also a fact because it denotes the situation correctly and accurately.

A chess observer, analyzing the different states of affairs in combination, may not only describe the current configuration of the play in the language (notation) of chess but also assess how the entire game is unfolding—whether player A enjoys a strategic advantage over player B.

To depict a general state of affairs in Wittgenstein’s symbolic notation requires that **every** logical sign deputizes for the object (a chess piece) it represents in such a way that **each** and **other** logical signs which individually form atomic propositions—rendered in symbolic notation as p , q , r —“picture” together the overall logical *holding-together-of- things*.

Now, the logical “picture,” which consists of a set of propositions, *is* itself a fact. This representation may be judged true or false.¹¹ If it properly portrays the state of affairs, then it is a correct picture; if not, it is a false depiction.

¹¹ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §3.14, §4.06

To sum up, the twofold sense of truth in Wittgenstein's symbolic notion consists of the actual logical situation of things *and* the depiction of that situation in propositions.

Wittgenstein holds in *Tractatus* that *reality* as such – the world as a whole—is the totality of *all* states of affairs.¹² The *Tractarian* universe is objective and independent, and that it consists of states of affairs – not people and objects.

Although Wittgenstein's twofold sense of truth is a logical notion, it may well be applied to the study of history. The sum total of history, one may also claim, consists of **all** the states of affairs that occurred in the past. Here, the locution “states of affairs” includes all events happening in the world caused by human will and actions. Just as the “facts” in logic are described in propositions—and their descriptions judged rightly or falsely, so too the states of affairs in history are recounted in narratives which can be judged true or false.

In history, it is not only necessary to establish that such-and-such event occurred at some point in time but also to compose a faithful account of it. Put another way, in the writing of history, a distinction should be made between *facts as real situations* and *facts as true depictions of the states of affairs*.¹³

Historical events are impervious to the right-or-wrong valuation, since they are objective facts. That an earthquake struck Lisbon in November 1755 which caused the death of thousands and wreaked havoc in the city and occasioned the philosophical lamentation of Voltaire is not a matter of right or wrong.

On the other hand, historical writings that recount past events are subject to the criterion of truth and falsity.

To illustrate, let us refer to an example.

¹² Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*, §1.1.

¹³ Peter Kosso, “Philosophy of Historiography,” in *A Companion to the Philosophy of History and Historiography*, ed. Aviezer Tucker (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 12.

The EDSA Revolution in 1986 is one of the most defining moments in Philippine history. It is a revolution that toppled the dictatorship of Marcos and brought back the long-lost freedom and democracy to the Filipino nation.

No one doubts the historicity of EDSA as a great event or a historical state of affairs. Like any other revolution that changed the course of a nation's history, EDSA Revolution is a complex actuality constituted by a plethora of states of affairs happening in a rapid and dizzying succession.

Any historian who aspires to write the history of the EDSA Revolution should not only have a firm grip of how the states of affairs (facts) hold together but also possess a historical perspective broad enough to see the event in its entirety and details.

Clarity and accuracy are essential elements of a historical account, since a single fact falsely reported, depicted, and narrated may distort the real historical significance of a past event.

Distortionists, contortionists, and revisionists of history do not usually attempt to skew the historicity of epochal events like the EDSA Revolution because such a grand shebang is so compelling in its factuality that no individual or group of persons can effectively gainsay its historical truth. They only twist some particular facts in order to confound the perception of people and cast a shadow of doubt over the integrity of the whole event.

It is an undisputed fact (state of affairs), for instance, that on the 24th of February 1986 Marcos was heard over the radio by millions swearing to annihilate the rebels hunkered down in Camp Crame and Camp Aguinaldo. "We'll wipe them out. It is obvious they are committing rebellion," he roared.¹⁴ One order he gave that day was his command to Colonel Antonio Sotelo and the Fifteenth Strike Wing of the Philippine Air Force to bomb the rebels' redoubt.¹⁵

¹⁴ Manuel L. Quezon III, ed., *Heroism, Heritage, and Nationhood* (Manila: The Presidential Communications Development and Strategic Planning Office, 2016), 219.

¹⁵ Mark Turner, ed., *Regime Change in the Philippines: The Legitimation of the Aquino Government* (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University, 1987), 24.

But, thankfully, Col. Sotelo and his pilots disobeyed the Commander-in-Chief and defected to the people's fold at the most critical moment of People Power Revolution.¹⁶ “We followed our conscience. I think I have not really done much in my life. For once, I wanted to make a decision for my country,” Sotelo said.¹⁷

That Col. Sotelo and his flyers did not carry out Marcos's order is hardly disputed by anyone. But Marcos's offspring, loyalists, sycophants, yahoos, and trolls now distort this fact by saying that the dictator resisted the urging of Gen. Fabian Ver and his top military commanders to launch a ground-and-air assault on the rebels.¹⁸ They even point to the TV clip in which Marcos was cutting off Gen. Ver and tersely telling him to “disperse them [the civilians] without shooting them.”¹⁹

But all this was for show. Sandra Burton, the American Journalist who was present during the press conference as an eyewitness wrote: “Viewers had just witnessed another bit of play-acting, or *moro-moro*, between Marcos and Ver, which seemed intended to impress upon his official US audience the president's concern for preventing bloodshed, even as the Americans' sensitive communications devices were intercepting his generals' orders to fire on rebel headquarters.”²⁰

The fact is, Marcos gave his commanders on the ground the marching order to crush the rebels at all cost. “[E]ven as he spoke, his generals were ordering Colonel Balbas to stop making excuses and fire the mortars he had positioned early that morning on the golf course inside Camp Aguinaldo,” Burton wrote.²¹

¹⁶ *Sunday Times Magazine*, March 2, 1986.

¹⁷ Ben Cal, “The Turning Point of the Historic 1986 People Revolution Recalled,” February 24, 2019, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1062821>, (accessed November 15, 2020).

¹⁸ Pia Lee-Brago, *The Philippine Star*, February 28, 2016.

¹⁹ PTV4, “Press Conference of President Ferdinand Marcos on February 24, 1986,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JbF2u451UiI>, (accessed November 15, 2020).

²⁰ Sandra Burton, *Impossible Dream: The Marcoses, the Aquinos, and the Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Warner Books, 1989), 400.

²¹ Burton, *Impossible Dream*, 400.

The claim that Marcos blocked his commanders from attacking Camp Crame is a blatant distortion of a well-known historical fact, which was designed to portray him in a favorable light.

The example is meant to underline the difference between **fact** as objective state of affairs and **fact** as faithful depiction of it. The former stands outside the circumstances of the historian; the latter falls under the office of the historian.

Although facts of history as such are resistant to the true-false logical permutation, they are vulnerable to the historians' presuppositions and prejudices. The perception of future generations of Filipinos, for example, will be influenced by what present-day historians, commenters, and thinkers write about events of recent past – like the 1986 EDSA Revolution and events unfolding in the present.

Therein lies the real challenge in the study of history.

Since historical facts are liable to be distorted, it is extremely important that the present generation of this nation should be on the lookout for the dangers of deception respecting the integrity of its history. For there are those who fabricate evidences and stake out their own universe of “alternative facts.”

Revisiting the Recent Past: The Marcos Dictatorship

We have earlier remarked that a historian interprets the past from the standpoint of the present as well as from his subjective perspective. A historical account is therefore a product of the historian's intellectual background, cultural preconceptions, political and ideological affiliations, political predispositions, and personal predilections.

“One does not go naked into the archives,” the philosopher Arthur Danto once observed.²² For no matter how solemnly a historian professes the vow of objectivity, he cannot disengage himself from the orbit of his culture, language, and milieu.

Clothed he enters the archives and clothed he will leave it.

“Strictly speaking,” Nietzsche writes, “there is no ‘presuppositionless’ science [‘*voraussetzungslose*’ *Wissenschaft*], the thought of such a thing is unthinkable, paralogical.”²³ Historiography is no exemption. For historians as human beings are involuntarily urged by the consideration of their interests and values. “Behind all logic . . . stand valuations [Wertschätzungen] or, stated more clearly, physiological requirements for the preservation of a particular type of life.”²⁴

“In every case [. . .] interpretation is grounded,” Martin Heidegger points out, “in something we have in advance—in a fore-having.” He further explains that “[a]s the appropriation of understanding, the interpretation operates in Being towards a totality of involvements which is already understood—a Being which understands.”²⁵ What Heidegger says here is that the condition of possibility for interpretation grounds itself in human existence—or in the *givenness of Being (reality)*.

The English philosopher R. G. Collingwood affirms what Nietzsche and Heidegger assert. He explains that “reality exists as we conceive it: but it does not in itself determine how we shall conceive reality: that is to say[,] it is a pure form which does not dictate its own content.”²⁶

²² Arthur Danto, *Analytical Philosophy of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 101.

²³ Quoted in Anthony K. Jensen, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 125.

²⁴ Quoted in Jensen, *Nietzsche’s Philosophy of History*, 125.

²⁵ Martin Heidegger, “Phenomenology and Fundamental Ontology: The Disclosure of Meaning,” in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Volmer (New York: Continuum, 1985), 223.

²⁶ R. G. Collingwood, *Lectures on the Ontological Proof* (unpublished essay), 22.

The *reality* which we know is a “filtered reality” grasped through the grid of culture, language, and shared experiences.

What *all* this means in historiography is that historians cannot attain a presuppositionless historical point of view, and that they are left with their integrity and good faith to navigate the crosscurrents (the Scylla and Charybdis of narrow waters) of subjectivity and objectivity knowing that, as Thomas Nagel tells us in his book *A View from Nowhere*, there is no straight and smooth way forward but only a constantly zigzagging and turbulent rush between two conflicting riptides.²⁷

The virtues of integrity and good faith are two essential qualities of a good historian.

In writing his historical account, the sense of integrity will urge a critical-scientific historian to try his best to do serious, scholarly work. Good faith will persuade a historian that he has the moral duty to be truthful in writing his historical account for the sake of posterity.

Of course, these are ideal criteria for historians, which are more honored in the breach than the observance. But this fact does not in any way lessen the historian’s ethical responsibility to aspire, to the best of his ability, for the ideal and the optimum.

With the preceding as the backdrop, let us now try our hand—in this and in the next sections—at reading and interpreting some events in contemporary Philippine history.

Let us examine Marcos’s imposition of Martial Law in 1972.

The late dictator Ferdinand Marcos was scrupulously minded about his place in history. He was so anxious about how history would judge him that he

²⁷Thomas Nagel, *A View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

even penned a deceitful chronicle published as *Notes on the New Society* to make himself appear good to posterity and justify his imposition of Martial Law.²⁸

State-published in 1973, when the author was at the height of absolute power, the *Notes* was conceived, crafted, and canned as a document for the use of future historians. Two hundred years from now, a naïve historian, for instance, may be led to regard Marcos's *Notes* as an authentic historical source.

Here are some excerpts from his *Notes*.

I am, to be sure, accountable to history for 21 September 1972 when I signed the proclamation placing the entire Philippines under martial law. And yet solely and completely responsible as I am for this decision, *I cannot escape the sense that events, the thrusts of history, and even the will of the people, somehow guided my hand to the deed (italics mine).*²⁹

These lines show the crafty dictator had debauched sense of history. He took great pains to impress on the reader's mind the notion that the imposition of Martial Law on the country was necessitated by the historical exigencies of the moment. But Marcos's invocation of history was a veneer for his lust for power. He enforced Martial Law on the nation not because he was driven by some noble principles and ideals. Marcos had only one motivation when he ruled the Philippines with a mailed fist: his burning ambition to perpetuate his rule. He further writes:

Our martial law is unique in that it is based on the supremacy of the civilian authority over the military and on complete submission to the decision of the Supreme Court (additions mine).³⁰

²⁸ See Ferdinand Marcos, *Notes on the New Society of the Philippines* (Manila: Marcos Foundation, 1973).

²⁹ Marcos, *Notes*, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 103.

When one recalls the excesses, abuses, and atrocities inflicted on the thousands of hapless victims of Martial Law,³¹ and when one contemplates the economic havoc he brought on the country, these Marcosian words ring hollow and cynical. To say that Martial Law was “based on the supremacy of the civilian authority over the military” was a cruel insult to us Filipinos.

We cannot recall an instance in the annals of history in which a strongman seized power by arms and then dutifully submitted himself to the benign dispositions of civilian rule.

The image that remotely bears some resemblance to such a figure is that of Caesar Augustus. That remarkable man, after crushing his competitors and securing the complete command of the Roman legions, labored to preserve the appearance of a republican rule in the Roman Empire. He etched in the mind of the obsequious Roman Senate the image of its supreme authority and permitted it to continue exercising the legislative functions and administrative offices.

But Augustus kept for himself the substantial matters of sovereignty – the consular (financial and legislative) and the tribunitian offices (civil, executive, and judicial authority). “When the consular and tribunitian powers were united, when they were vested for life in a single person, when the general of the army was, at the same time, the minister of the senate and the representative of the Roman people, it was impossible to resist the exercise, nor was it easy to define the limits, of his imperial prerogative,” observes Edward Gibbon.³²

Augustus the Emperor differed from Marcos the Dictator in two essential ways. Firstly, unlike Marcos, Augustus was not consumed by avarice; although, like Marcos, the latter went to great lengths to preserve the outward form of civil authority. In contrast, Marcos did not only obliterate the substance of civilian rule. He robbed his people; and he surrounded himself with cronies and

³¹ See Raissa Espinosa-Robles, *Marcos Martial Law: Never Again* (Manila: Filipinos for a Better Philippines, Incorporated, 2016).

³² Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 43. This is an unabridged version.

connivers, foremost among whom was his wife Imelda.³³ Secondly, Augustus wisely eschewed the use of military force as a dangerous instrument of government. In this respect, he showed himself an astute ruler. “It was more agreeable to his temper, as well as to his policy,” Gibbon remarks, “to reign under the venerable names of ancient magistracy, and artfully to collect in his own person all the scattered rays of civil jurisdiction.”³⁴

In contrast, Marcos propped up his power on the odious foundation of terror. After the tyrant declared Martial Law, and after he fashioned the military as his instrument of brutality, he gagged the media, jailed his political opponents and the so-called “enemies” of the state, emasculated the Supreme Court, ensconced his lackeys in government positions, amassed ill-gotten wealth, abolished Congress, dismantled the presidential system, established his rubber-stamped parliament, and corrupted the body politic of the country.³⁵

Those who experienced the evils of the Marcos dictatorship need not be reminded that the Filipino nation lost its freedom during the Martial Law. The current generation of Filipinos does not know what it was like to live under the iron rule of autocracy.

Perhaps present-day Filipinos do not even care to know about it. Many are forgetful and even neglectful of their history. But the crimes committed by Marcos will never be effaced from our shared memory. No matter how much the Marcoses try to deodorize their chief’s legacy, history will not be kind to the man who brought so much evil and suffering on the nation.

Marcos once said that history is not yet finished with him. Perhaps he vainly hoped that one day the evil deeds he had done will be forgotten by history;

³³ Marcos is one of the most notorious and rapacious thieves of all time. The Marcos Family and its parasites stole about 5 to 10 billion dollars from the Filipinos. In 1968, three years into his first term, Marcos and his wife Imelda deposited the amount of \$950,000 into their bank account in Credit Suisse in Zurich under the aliases “William Saunders” and “Jane Ryan.” Their declared income tax returns from 1949 to 1984 was only 16.4 million pesos. Raissa Espinosa-Robles, *Marcos Martial Law: Never Again* (Manila: Filipinos for A Better Philippines, Incorporated, 2016), 25-6.

³⁴ Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, 42.

³⁵ See Primitivo Mijares, *The Conjugal Dictatorship of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos* (San Francisco, U.S.A: Union Square Publications, 1976).

or, perhaps, he had imagined that someday his atrocious reputation will be transmuted, by means of some political prestidigitation, into that of a sensational hero.

That will never happen. If he were a despot who lived in some remote period of antiquity, perhaps history would have overlooked his repressive regime and acquitted him of his crimes for lack of evidence and testimonies.

But it is our good fortune that we live in an age when a leader's sins do not go unnoticed, unrecorded, and even unpunished.

The foregoing is a personal account of a state of affairs in the recent history of our nation. Actually, *nothing* new is said in the preceding. The question is whether my account approximates to historical truth or whether it accurately depicts a particular state of affairs in its essentials.

The reader may judge my narrative for himself. I would like to ask anyone who would dispute my take on the legacy of Marcos to consider and ponder this question: What would a thinking and decent person say about the character of the president of the Philippines who wore fake war medals, and also faked his so-called Maharlika guerrilla group during World War II?³⁶

Interpreting the Present Historically and Philosophically

(A) *The Marcos Narrative*

This author recently watched with mild amusement the room-temperature debate on TV between John Nery, a columnist of *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, and Fr. Ranhilio Aquino, the Dean of the San Beda University's School of Law.³⁷ The core issue in the debate sprang from Aquino's jiving tweet commenting that:

³⁶ See Jeff Gerth and Joel Brinkley, "Marcos's Wartime Role discredited in U.S. Files," *The New York Times*, January 1986.

³⁷ See the debate online: ANC, [Historical revisionism of Marcos' Martial Law? | ANC - YouTube](#), (accessed November 17, 2020).

The present generation that is loud in its condemnation of Marcos never experienced Marcos. So that rant is directed at their construct of Marcos. Shouldn't they be studying Derrida and Lyotard more? (emphasis mine).³⁸

Aquino's tweet was meant, advertently or inadvertently, to taunt the late dictator's critics whom he perhaps considers way below the level of his intellectuality.

What strikes many—*ang dating sa marami*—is that, by dropping the names of the French philosophers Jacques Derrida and Jean François Lyotard in a rant, Aquino was indirectly telling his readers in Twitter that before they “condemn” Marcos, they should first study Derridean deconstructionist theory and read Lyotardian postmodernist expostulations, so that they can have a juster understanding of his legacy. Now, to implicitly suggest that Marcos's critics are either way below his pitch or unacquainted with postmodern philosophy is indeed provocative.

And it did provoke, to Aquino's surprise, many thinking netizens, one of whom is an astute political commentator—John Nery. In response to Aquino's tweet, Nery wrote a column titled “The unfortunate Ranhilio Aquino, Marcos apologist.”³⁹ To have a good background of their debate, the reader may refer to Nery's column in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (cited above) and Aquino's rejoinder in *The Manila Times*.⁴⁰

Aquino contends in the main that he is concerned about what he perceives as “intolerance for (sic) non-popular positions;” that his controversial tweet is not an apology for Marcos; that he only wants to remind the present

³⁸ See Aquino's tweet: [Fr. Ranhilio Aquino on Twitter: "The present generation that is loud in its condemnation of Marcos never experienced Marcos. So that rant is directed at their construct of Marcos. Shouldn't they be studying Derrida and Lyotard more?" / Twitter](#), (accessed November 17, 2020).

³⁹ See and read John Nery's column, “The unfortunate Ranhilio Aquino, Marcos apologist,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, September 15, 2020, (<https://opinion.inquirer.net/133575/the-unfortunate-ranhilio-aquino-marcos-apologist#ixzz6eMHBINuN>), (accessed November 18, 2020).

⁴⁰ See Aquino's column “Mr. Nery should read,” *The Manila Times*, September 16, 2020, <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/09/16/opinion/columnists/topanalysis/mr-nery-should-read/768448/>.

generation that there are—vis-à-vis “grand narratives”—“petit narratives” that should also be heard; that the point of his tweet is to create a space for an “intellectual approach” or discussion respecting “grand narratives;” and that he is also an ardent friend of truth as Nery is.

Throughout his debate with Nery, Aquino kept on conflating three philosophical terms around which his entire argumentation revolves: construct, paradigm, and grand narrative. In philosophy, these notions are not strictly bounded; and they naturally converge, intersect, and overlap.

Asked by Christian Esquerra, the ANC anchor, to comment on the perception of many that he is reducing “established facts”—such as the “massive looting” during Martial Law—to “a mere construct,” Aquino responds that “there is no knowledge that is without constructs,” and that “yes, the facts are there but you *have to choose* which of [them] . . . you will consider relevant, [and] you have to organize [them]. . .(italics for emphasis).”

Let us first dissect the first part of Aquino’s answer: “there is no knowledge without constructs.”

If by knowledge Aquino means scientific knowledge then he is correct—that is, from the constructivist point of view. The Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico, for instance, holds that our civil world (*cose mondiale*) and human institutions (*cose umane*)—like all geometrical equations—are “constructed,” since they are products of the “modifications” of the human mind.⁴¹ The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard also said that in science “nothing is given, [for] all is constructed (*Rien n’est donné. Tout est construit*).”⁴²

In his column in *The Manila Times*, Aquino also asserts that “[a]ll human understanding works with constructs.” The assertion, however, is philosophically problematic. For not all human knowledge or understanding is constructed or mediated.

⁴¹ Giambattista Vico, *The New Science: The Principles of the New Science Concerning the Common Nature of Nations*, trans. David Marsh (London: Penguin Books, 1999), [331].

⁴² Gaston Bachelard, *La formation de l’esprit scientifique: Contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective*, 5th ed. (Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 1967), 18.

My commonsense familiarity—or what the Spanish-American philosopher Jorge Santayana calls “animal faith”—that fire is hot is a direct, self-evident, and unmediated knowledge.⁴³ So is my sensation of toothache—something which I cannot deny or doubt. My personal experience—and understanding—of my mother’s love is not based on any kind of conceptual construct.

The term “construct” is usually employed in exact, experimental, and social sciences. For it is a conceptual model used to crunch available data and information or explain a given set of conditions or depict aspects of the external world.

One example of a construct is Newton’s theory of gravity (physics). Another is Bertrand Russell’s theory of logical types (logic). By definition, a construct is essentially a creation of the human mind – a contrivance not contingent on empirical data. Since a construct is *subjective*, it may be replaced by another.

It is in the second part of Aquino’s reply that we see the main flaw in his line of reasoning. For he commits the logical fallacy of exclusion or incomplete evidence. “Yes, the facts are there but *you have to choose* which of [them] . . . you will consider relevant, [and] you have to organize [them] . . .,” he argues (*italics for emphasis*).

Note the italicized phrase: *you have to choose*. Aquino’s legal mind lets slip that you have to cherry pick your data (facts) and then assemble your bricks to build your *Lego House* of knowledge.

The fallacy of cherry picking is archetypally illustrated in the two statements below.

Asked if he would apologize for his father’s dictatorship and kleptocracy, Bongbong Marcos replied: “Will I say sorry for the thousands and thousands of kilometers [of roads] that were built? Will I say sorry for the agricultural policy

⁴³ See George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1929).

that brought us to self-sufficiency in rice? Will I say sorry for the power generation? Will I say sorry for the highest literacy rate in Asia? What am I to say sorry about?"⁴⁴

Marcos did not only commit the fallacy of ignoring inconvenient facts; he also lied and insulted us.

The second is also a classic example of card stacking – and gaslighting.

It cannot be doubted that *some were killed and hurt* because Martial Law as (sic) in place—but *there are many killed and hurt now, without martial law, as there were in administrations past*. There are some stringent requirements to be able to impute fault on the basis of “command responsibility”. . . . How does [the doctrine of command responsibility] factor into the decision about whether or not there is a constitutional obstacle to laying Marcos’ remains to rest in a cemetery that reserves its plots for fallen soldiers and former presidents? *And by what standard of reckoning can one say, with the certitude that the law requires, that the evil attributed to him cancels out that good that he achieved?* And is it not settled doctrine in constitutional law that when there are no judicial standards to go by, there is no justiciable issue? (italics mine).

The above quotation is culled from another column of Aquino in *The Manila Times*.⁴⁵

Now, let us reformulate – and dramatize – the logic, spirit, and sense of the preceding reasoning in the following:

It is perfectly okay to bury Marcos in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*. Yes, there were “some” who were killed—and tortured—during Martial Law, but many are also being butchered today through Extrajudicial Killings (EJKs) or being eviscerated by Covid-19. So, what is the problem? Besides, Marcos did a lot of

⁴⁴ Ayee Macaraig, “Marcos on Dad’s Regime: What am I to apologize for?” *Rappler*, August 26, 2015, [Marcos on dad’s regime: What am I to apologize for? \(rappler.com\)](https://www.rappler.com/marcos-on-dads-regime-what-am-i-to-apologize-for/), (accessed November 18, 2020).

⁴⁵ Ranhilio Aquino, “Honorably dismissed . . . really?” *Manila Standard*, September 5, 2016, [Dishonorably ousted...really? - Manila Standard](https://www.manilastandard.com.ph/news/2016/09/05/honorably-dismissed-really/), (accessed November 18, 2020).

good *naman* to his *compadres* and his multitude of *inaanak*. He was a former President and soldier. There was no ground for anyone to argue that he could not share the hallowed ground with the great Ramon Magsaysay and the great Manuel L. Quezon.

True to his words, Dean Aquino cherry picked the facts that appealed to him in constructing his “petit narrative” of Marcos. Never mind the **fact** that Marcos robbed the country bigtime; never mind the **fact** that his wife did the same; never mind the **fact** that he minted his own war medals; never mind the **fact** that he shut down Congress; never mind the **fact** that he muzzled the media; never mind the **fact** that he jailed his political opponents like Ninoy Aquino, “Ka Pepe” Diokno, Soc Rodrigo and many others; never mind the **fact** that young women activists such as Lilosa Hilao and Hilda Narciso were raped and tortured for days and nights on end – Marcos the Dictator had to be interred in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*.

Incredibly, Aquino – in the face of “tons of facts” of Marcos’s abuses, as Nery puts it, and protests from the citizens – saw nothing improper in Marcos’s burial in the *Libingan ng mga Bayani*!

When Esguerra asked him pointblank whether he is a revisionist [of history], Aquino replied: “No, I’m not. A revisionist is one who changes the facts. A revisionist is one who says that good is bad, and bad is good.”

Aquino’s answer is philosophically tendentious. A revisionist of history is not only one who “changes the facts;” a revisionist is also one who cherry picks the facts and ignores inconvenient truths to suit one’s private interests and ideological agenda.

From the standpoint of metaphysics of history, a philosopher-historian must not tweak or tinker with historical truth – embodied in the unshakeable cluster of hardened facts – the *hanging-and-holding-togetherness-of-things* (states of affairs).

Marcos’s imposition of Martial Law on our nation was not a single and isolated event in which he jailed his political opponents. It was an episode in

Philippine history consisting of an intricate network of intermeshing elements (facts) that hold fast together in such a way that the dismantling of one component will entail the destabilization of the whole.

Marcos's incarceration of his political enemies was materially linked with the systematic looting which he and his minions perpetrated; the accumulation of our backbreaking foreign debts; the gagging of the media; the abolition of Congress; the heinous crimes committed by the police and the army; and the metastasis of corruption in the vitals of our civil and political institutions.

All these harsh realities unshakably hang and hold together and constitute a dark chapter in our history.

A critico-scientific historian does not select particular items from a web of established facts and then arbitrarily arrange them according to his subjective criteria in order to form his own picture of *reality*. That is a wrong move in historical research.

The historian's account of a particular state of affairs in the past through the interpretation of evidence should conform to its actuality. Even if it is partial or tentative report, it is reasonably sufficient as long as it neatly dovetails with historical truth.

But arbitrarily rearranging a class of historical facts – or cherry-picking facts – entails its derangement as a state of affairs. Should there be any reordering at all, it would be the recalibration of the historian's kaleidoscope through which he sees things and events. It is the historian's lenses – or "construct" if we employ Aquino's locution – that should be adjusted, not the coherent cluster of solid facts (state of affairs).

Parenthetically, scientific constructs or paradigms do *not* create *reality* for us. They are models that describe and explain how *reality* comports itself. Some paradigms furnish us with clearer pictures of the world and things – others do not.

An example of a scientific paradigm is Newtonian physics which holds that some events have causes, while others happen due to the operation of laws. Eventually, Einsteinian physics which affirms that no events actually have causes supplanted that of Newton's much in the same way that Edison's light bulb eclipsed the candle. The changeover from Newtonian physics to Einsteinian physics is a watershed event in the scientific world, which is, in Thomas Kuhn's configuration, an example of a scientific revolution or paradigm shift.

Aquino's liberal use of the term "construct" in appraising political opinions, historical perspectives, cultural sentiments, social values, and moral matters is actually inapt. (Recall, he says that *all* knowledge **and** *all* human understanding are constructs). This is because the uncritical use of the word "construct" in philosophical discourse gives the impression that matters respecting politics, culture, religion, morality, and human relationships are products of a conscious and systematic process.

A scientific construct like Alan Turing's model of computation is the result of a self-reflective and intellectual exertion of a mathematical genius—so is Wittgenstein's symbolic notation which is a logical "construct" superior to that of Russell's.

But when we talk about human beliefs, values, and intuitions—in the sphere of religion, culture, politics, ethics, and communal life—we do not speak of mental constructs or paradigms *in the same way* we do in the realm of science. For a people's way of being is not about mental constructs, since it is something unconscious, pre-reflective, and pre-intellectual.

One component of a people's worldview, for example, is language. Language is just there—like our life.⁴⁶ We do not create or choose it; nor do we question or doubt it. We are simply born to it. And once we learn to speak our native tongue, we are held captive for the rest of our life, since we get on with our everyday affairs and transactions—thinking, reflecting, arguing, praying, playing, selling, buying, etc.—within its nurturing womb.

⁴⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. von Wright, trans. Denis and Paul and G. E. M. Anscombe (1969; repr., Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), §559.

In his tele-online debate with Nery, Aquino also laments that “little stories” (*petits récits*) are being shouted down and pushed aside by “grand narratives” (*métarécits*) from public discourse. We understand his Lyotardian lamentation. After all, Lyotard regards “grand narratives” with profound philosophical skepticism.⁴⁷

Lyotard’s sympathies lie with the “little stories” of groups and individuals at the margins because they are neglected owing to the dominance of the metanarratives. These “petit narratives,” he contends, actually offer a juster, truer, freer, livelier, richer, and deeper insights into *reality*.

Lyotard maintains that *reality* cannot be exhausted by the dispensations of one grand narrative because there is a diversity or multiplicity of points of view, beliefs, values – and truths.

The Lyotardian grand narrative is, briefly, a system of thoughts, presuppositions, beliefs, and practices that offers not only a way of looking at *reality* but also an explanation of what is true, good, and meaningful about human life, history, and experience – and how the world as we know it is organized.

A metanarrative claims an absolute truth against which other “truths” are ranged and judged. Examples of grand narratives are the Christian *Weltbild* (religion), the Enlightenment (philosophy), Marxism (politics/ideology), Capitalism (economics), etc.

Like Lyotard, Dean Aquino, a postmodern aficionado, also sympathizes with *petits récits* and deplores the metanarratives currently dominating our public discourse. The “little stories” should also be “listened to,” he argues.

But what are these grand narratives dominating our public sphere which Aquino is referencing? One such grand story, he tells us, is that Ninoy Aquino

⁴⁷ See Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1997).

“returned to the Philippines to save the country, and that Cory restored democracy.”⁴⁸

Such a “grand” story, he goes on to say, is “not necessarily false, but [it is a reconstruction of history] based on the selection of certain data, and the exclusion of others.” (The irony seems lost on Aquino that he is decrying what he himself is advocating—that is, one has to “choose” the facts which one deems “relevant” in forming one’s political opinions and judgments.)

Let us examine Dean Aquino’s food for thought.

Ninoy Aquino’s return to the country is a crucial link in the long chain of events that led to the fall of Marcos.

Ninoy never said that he wanted “to save the country.” Nor do the Filipino people who appreciate and admire his heroism and sacrifice claim that he is the savior of our nation in the same way that Jesus of Nazareth is the savior of the world.

Ninoy decided to come back to the country not to lead a revolution against Marcos or run for public office; although he was at the time the only figure in the opposition who could mount a good fight with Marcos in an election.

Ninoy returned to offer a hand of reconciliation to Marcos and to find ways of working peacefully with him. He was even willing to go back to prison and face firing squad.⁴⁹ That is why he came back alone, unarmed, and unaided. He himself said that he did not have all the solutions to the problems of the country. All he asked Marcos was “to return the freedom” to the Filipinos.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ See Aquino’s tweet, [Fr. Ranhilio Aquino on Twitter: "That is what a construct is. So what about the rival constructs that never find a voice because they are swamped by the dominant constructs or the grand narratives? That is what the moment of deconstruction consists in." / Twitter](#), (accessed November 20, 2020).

⁴⁹ Watch: [Full Airplane interview from August 21 1983 with Ninoy Aquino - YouTube](#), (accessed November 21, 2020).

⁵⁰ See Ninoy Aquino’s speech [NINOY AQUINO’s memorable speech \(6/9\) in Los Angeles \(2-15-1981\) - YouTube](#), (accessed November 21, 2020).

The man who was falsely accused of subversion (“of trying to overthrow the government”);⁵¹ the man who was tried by Marcos’ military kangaroo court and sentenced by firing squad; the man who suffered seven years of solitary confinement; the man who was deprived of his basic rights and freedoms; the man who went through the severest test of humiliation, loneliness, and conversion and learned to forgive; the patriot who chose to return to the country as a man of peace; the man who said that “the Filipino is worth dying for” and offered his life for his country—that man is *not* a savior; but he *is* a hero.

Ninoy Aquino’s personal story is, in fact, the proverbial triumph of *Le petit récit* over the dominant narrative of the Marcos dictatorship. When we look back to our recent past, we now see that Ninoy’s heroic death was the linchpin that triggered EDSA Revolution. That is why he deserves the eternal thanks of a grateful nation.

And what is an example of a *petit récit* for Dean Aquino? One such “little story” for him is the narrative of “all those people who celebrated [Marcos’s birthday in 2020] in Ilocos Norte.”

Aquino said that he wants to listen to their story. Fair enough.

Let us illustrate our view on the issue by using an analogy. Imagine in a fantasy world that my best friend John had an uncle who was once the mayor of our town. His uncle was tall, smart, witty, and religious. He was very kind to John and his siblings. He bought them gifts and toys. John adores his uncle and idol.

However, it was unknown to John, when he was growing up, that his uncle was very corrupt. When he was the mayor, he put up a shady system in which he could fill his pockets with cash from the municipal coffers. It was only when John was in College that he learned the stories of corruption wantonly perpetrated by his uncle. At first, he could not believe those stories. When his uncle was found guilty in court and imprisoned, the grim reality finally dawned on him. His uncle died as a disgraced man.

⁵¹ Watch interview: [Ninoy Aquino Jr. Sought Freedom, He Found It In CHRIST! - YouTube](#), (accessed November 22, 2020).

But John continues to love his uncle despite his being corrupt and greedy. He has not forgotten the good things he has *personally experienced* with him. Can I blame John? No.

Can I tell him to stop loving and adoring his uncle because of his corrupt practices as a mayor? No. For I respect John as a friend. I can listen to his story. I sympathize with him. In fact, I'll be interested in what he will say about his uncle whom I barely knew—from the perspective of Levinasian *otherness*.

But will I oppose the proposal of John, now a Councilor of our town, to put up a statue of his uncle in the plaza and declare his birthday as a holiday to honor his memory? Yes, I will.

Why? Because it is ethically improper of him to do so. If his uncle was just an ordinary citizen, and if John wanted to honor him with a statue in the backyard of their home, it would be perfectly fine with me. But his uncle was once a mayor of the town. It would be a great insult to our townmates to publicly honor a man who looted their money. He may be a loving uncle; but that doesn't obliterate the fact that he is a crook.

Dean Aquino professes himself a champion of *petits récits*. We wonder if he has also listened to the personal stories of the families of the victims of Martial Law. Their narratives are the authentic "little stories" of life and tragedy—not the narratives of those who have money and power like the Marcoses.

(B) *History Today, History Tomorrow*

We have remarked that the object of knowledge in historiography is the past. Historians do not concern themselves with future occurrences. Nor, in the strictest sense, do they take interest in the present since events are still unfolding. And, usually, it requires the range of historical perspective to discern their significance—although the things happening today, are organically related to the past and, on that point, may be an object of curiosity for present-day historians.

What we find remarkable about the recent developments in historiography is that the notion of history as the study of the past has undergone a radical and substantial change. Before the digital age, historians relied solely on physical evidence—artefacts, materials, and written documents—and testimonies of eyewitnesses in writing historical accounts.

In our time, we can capture events as they unfold in real time.

The idea of history as *what is happening now* perhaps made its debut in history when the crew of Apollo 11, led by Commander Neil Armstrong, landed on the moon on July 20, 1969.

That was probably the first moment in the annals of human affairs when an event of epic magnitude was chronicled in digital sequences as it unraveled and being watched by millions of viewers worldwide. That was the moment when the conception of history changed—from the notion of history as *what happened in the past* to the idea of history as *what is happening now*. In this last section, let us survey the Philippine political and social landscapes and try to examine some significant events unfolding in real time and being captured by digital algorithms.

As of this writing (November 2020), the Presidency of Rodrigo Duterte has about 18 months more before it runs its course. After that, his reign as a popular leader of the nation will come to an end.

Although it is not yet the proper time to appraise the legacy of Duterte's presidency and determine his rightful place in history, it is, nevertheless, neither unreasonable nor improbable to speculate how history will render its judgment on the current leader of our nation—his person, his presidency, and his performance.

On the assumption that *history is happening now*, let us consider Duterte's reign not on the basis what his supporters or critics say for or against him—for their views may be slanted—but on the strength of his own words and deeds.

For, philosophically speaking, a person's words are actually his *deeds*; and a person's *deeds* are his very words. For the words that come out of one's mouth mirror one's thoughts; and one's thoughts are the wellspring of one's will and action.⁵²

Even the good Old Book says that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks;⁵³ and that by one's words one will be justified, and by one's words one will be condemned.⁵⁴

What we shall write in the ensuing pages is an examination of what President Duterte actually says, indirectly or directly, about himself, his character, and innermost thoughts.

The mayor of Davao City won the 2016 democratic Presidential election with a high 39.01 percentage of the popular vote (around 16 million votes)—edging out two other strong candidates: Mar Roxas (23.45%) and Grace Poe (21.39%). His mandate was clearly cemented in a clean and fair election.

Duterte launched his bid for the Presidency on the platform that advocated the eradication of corruption and illegal drugs.

On the 21st of February, 2016, during the Presidential debate, Duterte made a promise in his peroration that he would end corruption, crime, and the traffic of illegal drugs “in a matter of three to six months.”⁵⁵ Around three weeks before that event, during the farmers' election forum on the 3rd of February, he castigated his critics for doubting his resolve and ability to end the evils besetting the country in six months; and accused them of being sissies (“*bayot sila*”), and that they were “scared to make mistakes, to kill, to die.”⁵⁶

⁵² Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 39, 46, 167.

⁵³ Matthew 12: 34 NAB.

⁵⁴ Matthew 12: 37 NAB.

⁵⁵ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: [Duterte debate closing words: I will stop drugs, crime, corruption - YouTube](#), (accessed, November 25).

⁵⁶ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: [Duterte: Don't believe I can end crime in 6 months? Bayot ka! \(rappler.com\)](#), (accessed, November 25).

“There is (sic) three million drug addicts. I’d be happy to slaughter them,” Duterte later ranted, drawing parallel between himself and Hitler.⁵⁷ He also said that he would be happy to dump them “into Manila Bay and fatten all the fish there.”⁵⁸ After his Inauguration as President, he egged on his listeners: “If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself.”⁵⁹

He did not only order the killings; he himself soiled his hands with blood. No, I’m not kidding, dear reader. In a speech to a group of businessmen, he admitted to personally killing drug suspects. He told his audience:

In Davao, I used to do it personally. Just to show to the [police] that if I can do it, why can’t you?⁶⁰

Martin Andanar, the Secretary of the Presidential Communications, clarified to the BBC that Duterte’s words “should not be taken literally,” and that he is “not a killer.”⁶¹ Andanar was being obtuse. Even before Duterte became President, he owned up to killing people in a 2015 interview conducted by Maria Ressa of *Rappler*. His words: “I must admit that I . . . killed . . . three months early on (sic) . . . three people.”⁶²

How will a future historian figure out the substance and meaning of Duterte’s words? All his words and locutions cited above were spoken and recorded in real time.

⁵⁷ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [Rodrigo Duterte is due in Israel on Sunday. Why are we opening our doors to him? | The Times of Israel](#), (accessed, November 26).

⁵⁸ Reuters Staff, “Factbox: Rodrigo Duterte on crime and punishment,” *Reuters*, May 13, 2016.

⁵⁹ Will Worley, “Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte tells people to ‘go ahead and kill’ drug addicts,” *Independent*, July, 3, 2016, [Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte tells people to ‘go ahead and kill’ drug addicts | The Independent | The Independent](#), (accessed November 26, 2020).

⁶⁰ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [Duterte admits personally killing suspects - YouTube](#), (accessed November 26, 2020).

⁶¹ Watch and listen to Andanar’s own words: [Duterte killing claim ‘should not be taken literally’ says Martin Andanar. - BBC News](#), (accessed November 27, 2020).

⁶² Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_FyB8vhevY, (accessed November 27, 2020).

The reader may read, check, and verify them in cyberspace. From the hermeneutical point of view, the naked beauty of Duterte's words owes itself to its purity, clarity, and crudity. There is no need for a critico-historian to do exegesis to discern the meaning of his expressions and expletives. Duterte does not usually resort to the use of figures of speech to clothe his bright or dark intentions – contrary to what his former spokesperson Ernesto Abella said that in parsing Duterte's words you have to use your "creative imagination."⁶³

Duterte's words detonate like dynamites loud and clear. What you hear from his mouth comes directly from the recesses of his thoughts. When he says to the police and the vigilantes "*Patayin nyo sila*" (slaughter them all), he is not talking allegorically.

Proof? Just look at the facts and figures.

According to the June 2020 report to the *United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*, the latest conservative number of people killed by the police and vigilantes since Duterte launched his war on illegal drugs in July 2016 is 8,663.⁶⁴ But the Philippine Commission on Human Rights thinks that the actual toll is triple than that figure. The same report cites the Supreme Court's concern that the Extrajudicial killings (EJKs) are likely state-sponsored.⁶⁵

In the essay *Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte*, Christopher Ryan Maboloc, makes a case for what he calls Duterte's "radical politics" as an archetype of governance based on a philosophical insight endorsed by Chantal Mouffe, a Belgian political theorist –

⁶³ Nestor Corrales, "Don't take Duterte's words literally, Palace exe tells media," *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, October 5, 2016, [Don't take Duterte's words literally, Palace exec tells media | Inquirer News](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁶⁴ See Human Rights Council, Forty-fourth session, 15 June-3 July 2020, *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General*, [OHCHR | Session44 44th session of the Human Rights Council: Reports](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁶⁵ Cited in the *Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General*.

that the reality of “conflicts and antagonisms” is a permanent facet in politics and public discourse.⁶⁶

Following Mouffe’s lead, Maboloc contends that Duterte “understands that politics is not about negotiations and complete agreements, but power relations and the deployment or use of effective public persuasion.”⁶⁷ He takes to task Duterte’s critics for “[framing] their assaults on his progressive style of governance by employing liberal standards.”⁶⁸

We do not know exactly what Maboloc means by Duterte’s “progressive style of governance,” since he does not elaborate his construal of it. But we understand his point that those who censure Duterte are wrong to apply “liberal standards” in criticizing his style of leadership.

For Maboloc, Duterte’s brand of governance is unique in the history of Philippine presidency, a leadership characterized by the strength of political will, the dynamic of raw power, “the grammar of dissent,” and the dialectic of confrontation. In governing the country, Duterte, Maboloc explicates, “knows all too well that political discourse is different from moral discourse”⁶⁹—a vital distinction that is lost on “modern liberals” who, Mouffe contends, “do not see any real difference in nature between moral philosophy and political philosophy.”⁷⁰

Firstly, Mouffe’s basic assumption that “conflicts and antagonisms” is a permanent feature in politics is not something new. At no point in the evolving history of public discourse will the reality of dispute and dissent disappear. For *that* is the very law of nature and things, an insight with which the Pre-Socratics were deeply acquainted before Hegel, Marx, and Carl Schmitt.

⁶⁶ Christopher Ryan Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda in the Radical Politics of President Duterte,” *Journal of Al Qalam Institute* Vol. 4 (2017): 3-24. Chantal Mouffe, “Liberalism and Modern Democracy,” in *Democracy and Possessive Individualism*, ed. Joseph Carens (New York: Suny Press, 1995), 178.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Mouffe, “Liberalism and Modern Democracy,” 187.

Secondly, to say that Duterte “knows all too well that political discourse is different from moral discourse” is to give him too much credit as a political practitioner. Considering his thoughts and articulations openly revealed in the sphere of public discourse, such a distinction is irrelevant to him. The various nuances of the distinction are ideationally alien to his thought processes.⁷¹ I seriously doubt if Duterte has heard Mouffe’s name.

But let us examine Maboloc’s train of thought respecting the distinction between politics and ethics as it impinges on Duterte’s substance of leadership.

In his article, Maboloc maintains that Duterte appreciates the subtle power and use of language in emphasizing not only “the value of emotions in politics” but also the necessity of “press[ing] an issue [using power language,] so that his listeners will pay serious attention.”⁷²

The implication is that when Duterte spews out the crispy “*Putang Ina [mo]!*” (You SOB!) – pardon the full rendition of the phrase, but Maboloc spells out the expletive in his essay—he is not really telling the addressee, Maboloc explains, that he is “a son of a whore;” instead, he is only using it as a tool of “effective public persuasion” to expound an issue of national importance and enlighten the Filipino mind.

The invective is not meant to insult and demean a person. There is nothing personal in it. It is not an ethical offence in Mouffe’s and Maboloc’s philosophical equation. “*Putang Ina [mo]*” is just a linguistic device employed by Duterte to persuade the gentlemen on the other side of the aisle and to inform the Filipino public about matters of governance, in order to push and realize his political agenda—crafted “on behalf of the masses in their struggle for political recognition.”⁷³ To understand Duterte’s use of “*Putang Ina [mo]*,” it should be put in its proper context where political discourse and moral disquisition are clearly delineated.

⁷¹ I say this not to depreciate the President’s intellection. After all, even John Rawls failed, according to Mouffe, to observe the distinction and, consequently, missed to understand “the nature of the political.” Mouffe, “Liberalism and Modern Democracy,” 187.

⁷² Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda,” 9 (additions mine).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 10.

Maboloc argues that, unlike the leaders of modern liberalism, Duterte “knows all too well” the subtleties of radical democracy, and that he has “mastered” the language of the common *Tao*.

So, when Duterte attacked Senator Franklin Drilon *ad hominem* in the televised 2020 SONA, saying “you are a hypocrite,” that was not meant to personally offend the Senator.⁷⁴ In Maboloc’s configuration, it was only intended to make a political point about the Senator’s inability to pass the anti-Dynasty law.

The same thing obtains when Duterte castigated the members of the Philippine Human Rights Commission, “You fools!”⁷⁵ Nothing personal there only political.

“Fuck you! *Putang Ina* [nyo]! EU (European Union).”⁷⁶ The cussword is just matter of politics, not ethics. “*Mga pari, mga putang Ina nyo! Buwisit!* [You priests, SOBs!]”⁷⁷

Nothing personal there, *trabaho lang* (just part of the job).

Andanar also affirms that Duterte’s “utterances are not personal attacks directed at particular persons but mere expressions of disgust and impatience over the many unresolved and unaddressed issues that remain pervasive to this day.”⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [SONA 2020: Duterte hits Drilon again - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁷⁵ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [A foul-mouthed 2016: The year in Duterte's curses - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁷⁶ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [A foul-mouthed 2016: The year in Duterte's curses - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁷⁷ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [A foul-mouthed 2016: The year in Duterte's curses - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁷⁸ R. G. Cruz, “Andanar seeks understanding for Duterte’s colorful words,” ABS-CBN News (December, 2016) [Andanar seeks understanding for Duterte's 'colorful language' | ABS-CBN News \(abs-cbn.com\)](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

Really? The former US President Barack Obama was once the target of Duterte's *Putang Ina mo!*"⁷⁹ But, apparently, Obama took it personally, since he cancelled his one-on-one meeting with Duterte in Laos—woefully oblivious of Maboloc's distinction between the public discourse and the moral discourse.

Referring to the cancellation of the meeting, Hillary Clinton, the former U.S. Secretary of State, said something that touched the marrow of the matter: "Words matter."⁸⁰

The point is this, offensive words of insult and vulgarity, when uttered by a leader of a country, do not only have political import but also moral impact. For politics and ethics are not strictly circumscribed philosophical notions; they integrally overlap and intertwine in the arena of public discourse. Politics is a sphere of thought where ethics *does* matter; just as ethics is a branch of philosophy where politics also impinges. In a democratic government, the interplay between the two discourses usually quivers and blends in the realm of grayness.

When Duterte made the threat to "destroy" Leila de Lima in public, it was not only a political threat; it was also a moral assault on her person as a Senator.⁸¹

Duterte's spokespersons and spinners are wont to claim that his words should not be taken out of their contexts; that he is only given to hyperboles or "colorful language;" and that, in the words of another Duterte's spokesperson Sal Panelo, "[t]his irreverent side of the Chief Executive has endeared him to the overwhelming majority which catapulted him to the presidency."⁸² Panelo's words are insulting. He is implying that Duterte's "irreverent side" – i.e.,

⁷⁹ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: [Duterte on Obama: "son of a bitch I will swear at you" - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸⁰ Arshad Mohammed and Jeff Mason, "After insult, U.S. and Clinton call for Duterte to show respect," *Reuters*, September 6, 2016, [After insult, U.S. and Clinton call for Duterte to show respect | Reuters](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸¹ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: [Duterte to a Girl Government Official: " I Will Destroy HER in Public" - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸² Virgil Lopez, "Palace: Duterte ditching colorful language an impossible dream," *GMA New Online* (January, 2019) [Palace: Duterte ditching colorful language an impossible dream \(gmanetwork.com\)](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

vulgarity—is an endearing Filipino attribute, and that the habit of orally ejaculating profanities such as “*Putang Ina mo*,” “*ugok*,” “*ulol*,” and “*gago*,” is, in the words of Andanar, a charming manner of “[speak[ing] in a language every Filipino can understand.”⁸³

That is bullshit. But, then, the reader may point out to us that Duterte still enjoys high satisfaction ratings in surveys, and that Filipinos laugh and howl in approval every time rounds of foulest missiles shoot from the Presidential mouth.

Good point.

But, imagine, dear reader, Cardinal Tagle disgorging a volley of *Putang Ina Mos* in a homily, or Leni Robredo using the filthiest invectives, or Pope Francis swearing, “*Brutto figlio di puttana bastardo!*” Will they endear themselves to us Filipinos? If Cardinal Tagle fires in a public forum just one shot of *Putang Ina mo* either in anger or jest, his credibility will crumble like a house of cards. His reputation will never recover.

The question is, why does Duterte get away with it? There are two obvious and interrelated reasons: that he is the most powerful man hereabouts; and that *he is really that kind of person which his words and locutions personify.*

Filipinos may laugh at Duterte’s crude jokes and expletives, but deep inside they really feel disgusted. They do not want their sons and daughters to imitate the man. Do you, dear reader?

The book of Sirach says: “[A]s the city’s ruler is, so are all its inhabitants.”⁸⁴ For once in my life, I would like to disagree with the Holy Scripture. For I really believe that we Filipinos are not like Duterte in manners, words, and deeds.

It haunts me, however, that an Australian once expressed his great dismay over the disturbing fact that Filipinos laughed at Duterte’s joke about an

⁸³ Martin Andanar, “A Man of Charisma,” *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, December, 2016.

⁸⁴ Proverbs 10: 2 (NRS).

Australian lay missionary who was raped and killed by rioting inmates in Davao. Duterte's words: "*Ang nagpasok sa isip ko, ni-rape nila, pinagpilihan nila doon. . . . Pero napakaganda, dapat ang mayor muna ang mauna. Sayang!*" (What came to my mind was, she was raped successively . . . But she's very pretty; the mayor should have been the first to do it. Pity!)"⁸⁵

And the crowds roared in laughter! Perhaps the Scripture is right after all. Duterte has brought out the worst in the Filipino.

In another article, Maboloc contends that Duterte's "progressive approach to governance" is "the kind of [leadership] that Filipinos need"—"a strong leadership" hewed from the granite crag of "radical politics" to "[transform] Philippine politics" and address "the historical injustices done against Muslim Filipinos;" that he is a president bristling with "political will;" "the true champion of law and order" who is "afraid of nothing;" a leader possessed of the "ability to charm his way into the hearts and minds of the masses;" the terror of the oligarchs; and the defender and protector of the "common good."⁸⁶

We disagree.

Firstly, let us examine if Duterte is indeed a leader out to "[transform] Philippine politics," as Maboloc contends.

Commenting on the Marcosian legacy, Maboloc rightly asserts that "[t]he dictator did not only steal from the Filipino people, he also took their political soul by imposing a virulent culture that is fueled by constant fear and harassment."⁸⁷

Maboloc's commentary is spot-on. But the problem is, the leader whom he acclaims as the one who will "transform Philippine politics" blatantly

⁸⁵ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: [Duterte jokes about raped Australian woman - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸⁶ See Christopher Ryan Maboloc, "The Radical Politics of Nation-States: The Case of President Rodrigo Duterte," *Journal of ASEAN Studies*, vol. 6 (2018): 111-29.

⁸⁷ Maboloc, "Situating the Mindanao Agenda," 7.

contradicts him. For Duterte assures us that Marcos is “a great president” and a “hero” to many” (the Ilocanos);⁸⁸ that Marcos would have been “the best president” if only he did not become a dictator;⁸⁹ that he deserved a hero’s burial;⁹⁰ that “Martial Law was very good;”⁹¹ and that if Bongbong Marcos wins his electoral protest, he will step down as President and allow Marcos to assume the presidency.⁹²

Even before he was swept to power on the wave of populism, the presidential candidate Duterte already declared Marcos as “a great president” and “a hero,” while Imee Marcos stood right on his side grinning and nodding with approval.⁹³

The fact is, Duterte is contradicting his own image as a man of contradiction, which is, as Maboloc would put it, cast in the theoretical mould of Mouffe’s “radical democracy.”

Transformative and “radical leadership?” A man fighting the oligarchs? Think again. The man styled as the scourge of the oligarchs is cavorting with the Marcoses, the biggest oligarchs, in the Philippines.

He even admitted that Imee Marcos donated a substantial amount to his campaign funds.⁹⁴ Duterte once explained that he just could not dissociate

⁸⁸ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [Press. DUTERTE - "Marcos is a national Hero" - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁸⁹ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [Duterte launches campaign: If I make a promise, I'll do it \(rappler.com\)](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁹⁰ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=19kBBhU6Ms0>, (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁹¹ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXX5N1sbK A>, (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁹² [Duterte to resign if Bongbong Marcos wins election protest - YouTube](#), (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁹³ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4ess8NFVPg>, (accessed November 29, 2020).

⁹⁴ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [Duterte donor Imee Marcos not in his SOCE - YouTube](#), (accessed November 29, 2020).

himself from Marcos because his father, who was once a member of Marcos's cabinet, "stood with Marcos in his darkest hours."⁹⁵

Duterte rants against the oligarchs and sides with the downtrodden. He did not, however, sprout from the dusty ground of the hoi polloi as Magsaysay did. Unlike Magsaysay who worked as a chauffeur to underwrite his studies in the University of the Philippines, Duterte enjoyed the privileges of being born to a wealthy and powerful family. As of this writing, Duterte has not yet disclosed his 2018-2019 SALN, a non-act worthy of an oligarch.

Secondly, much has been made of Duterte's "strong style of leadership" – that he is a man wielding the proverbial "political will" to solve the problems and malaise of the country, a leader who, in the words of Maboloc, "is strong enough to institute the sweeping changes in a weak state like the Philippines."⁹⁶

Again, we disagree. To explain, let us talk about China.

On the 12th of July 2016, the Philippines won a resounding legal victory when the Den Haag's Arbitral Tribunal debunked China's ridiculous claim over the Western Philippine Sea and upheld the country's right over its 200-nautical mile *exclusive economic zone* (EEZ), as stipulated in the *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea* (UNCLOS), of which China is a signatory.

Despite all the political pressures and bullying of China, the Philippine government – led by the former president Benigno Aquino, whose leadership Maboloc summarily dismisses as "lackadaisical" – pushed for legal arbitration in the international court, a shrewd diplomatic maneuver which was clearly urged and motivated by the interest of the Filipino people.

Now, what did the brave man with "political will" do? Asked if he would allow the Chinese to fish in our EEZ, Duterte replied: "*Sabi ko, 'Of course.'*" *'Yan*

⁹⁵ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: [Duterte: My father stood by Marcos during his darkest hour - YouTube](#), (accessed November 29, 2020).

⁹⁶ Maboloc, "Situating the Mindanao Agenda," 17.

ang pinag-usapan namin noon, kaya tayo nag-uusap eh.”⁹⁷ [“I said, of course. That was what we talked about.”]

When a Chinese ship *Yuemaobinyu* 42212 intentionally rammed a Filipino fishing vessel with extreme prejudice in a hit-and-run attack inside our maritime territory,⁹⁸ what did Duterte do to defend our poor fishermen and stand up for them?

Nothing. *Wala. Nichts.*

Showing anger and pity (for the poor fishermen), the Mayor of San Jose Mindoro expressed the common sentiment of the Filipinos at that time: “*Ipakita natin ‘yung ating muscle. Kung wala man tayong muscle sa giyera eh, sa bunganga man lang.*” [Let’s flex our muscle. If we don’t have any for war, well, at least, through the muscle of the mouth.]⁹⁹

Exactly. That was the right moment when the President’s mouth could have been put to good use. But the Presidential gullet opened no fire – no *Putang Ina mo* came out in defense of the Filipino honor. No growl, no grunt, no grumble – nothing.

Worse, in his 2019 SONA, he capitulated to the Chinese, virtually dropping our stake over the disputed islands: “I cannot go there (West Philippine Sea) even with the Coast Guard to drive them (Chinese) away. China also claims the property, and he is in possession (of it). *‘Yan ang problema.*” [“That is the problem.”]¹⁰⁰

No. That is not the problem. Staking out a claim over what is rightfully ours does not mean we have to go to war with the Chinese. The problem is, Rodrigo

⁹⁷ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [Duterte says he can't ban Chinese from fishing in PH waters \(rappler.com\)](#), (accessed November 29, 2020).

⁹⁸ Watch [TIMELINE: Sinking of Filipino boat in West PH Sea by Chinese ship \(rappler.com\)](#), (accessed November 29, 2020).

⁹⁹ Watch [Occidental Mindoro town mayor to Duterte: Let’s speak out against China \(rappler.com\)](#), (accessed November 29, 2020).

¹⁰⁰ Watch and listen to Duterte’s own words: [State of the Nation Address \(SONA\) 2019 07/22/2019 - YouTube](#), (accessed November 29, 2020).

Duterte, the man who promised (or joked?) to jet ski alone to wrestle the *Panatag* Shoal from the Chinese bravely turned his tail and fled at the moment when danger had not even reared its ugly head.

It appears that Duterte is only bold and unafraid when he is in the position of power. When he was the Mayor of Davao City, he ruled over it like his personal fiefdom for more than two decades. He was tough, merciless, and feared. He could do almost *anything* and get away with it. He was a law unto himself, pretty much in the same way that the Kantian *pure will* gives the moral law unto itself. The same thing obtains now that he is the President of the Philippines.

But the character of a person is not tested when he is in the position of strength. Great men and women in history proved their mettle in the crucible of fire. Mahatma Gandhi confronted the mighty British Empire alone – from the position of powerlessness. Nelson Mandela showed, for twenty-seven years, coruscating courage and endurance in his struggle for the liberation of his people – from the position of helplessness in the prison cell.

Marcos tried hard with his iron clamp to crack and crush Ninoy Aquino during his incarceration for seven years but failed. The latter showed strength and steadfastness in the darkness of solitary confinement.

But Duterte? Has he ever been tried and tested in the heated vat of suffering – from the position of powerlessness? Will he be as strong as Mandela if he finds himself in a damp prison cell languishing for the sake of our nation? Will he be as courageous as Martin Luther King in fighting for some noble cause? Will he put himself in the line of fire for the country as did Jose Rizal?

Duterte is actually a weak leader.

Let us just cite one reason. He is very onion-skinned to criticisms. When Ombudswoman Conchita Carpio-Morales, former chief Justice Maria Sereno, Senator Leila de Lima, Maria Ressa of *Rappler*, and Sr. Patricia Fox – all women stood up to him, Duterte took their dissent personally and went after them.

A president who has to resort to *ad hominem*s, harass his critics in public, and jail his political opponents is not a strong leader. In fact, he is a very weak leader because his governance is so fragile and brittle that he cannot lead with opposition and criticism.

But a president who welcomes his critics to hoot and heckle all day but who still effectively governs within the remit of the law and the Constitution and pushes his programs in the Legislature without hurling threats and insults is a strong leader.

It is said that Franklin Roosevelt, a polio cripple, nudged his department officials and secretaries to disagree with him and with one another on matters of governance; and after he made the decision, they were so actuated to realize it.

That is a strong leader.

Thirdly, some people think that Duterte has only in mind and heart the good and interest of the Filipinos, especially those at the margins of society.

We seriously doubt it. No, we will not talk at this point about the tragic plight of the poor who bear the full brunt of Duterte's brutal war on illegal drugs.

Let us talk about Filipino women, who constantly find themselves targets of misogyny, disrespect, and physical abuse even in this so-called postmodern time. Filipino women make up the greater bulk of the marginalized sector of our society.

Maboloc asserts that “[a] good leader protects the interest of the public whereas a bad leader serves his own.”¹⁰¹

That is correct. But we may add that a good leader protects especially the interest of those at the peripheries of society. But is Duterte such a leader, one who fights, say, for the dignity and honor of Filipina womanhood? *Nah*. He is not.

¹⁰¹ Maboloc, “Situating the Mindanao Agenda,” 17.

For all his fulminations against social injustices, for all his ravings that he fights for the poor, the downtrodden, and the alienated, he has shown a very uncouth attitude to more than half of the inhabitants of this benighted land: grandmothers, mothers, wives, sisters, women OFWs, and women *kasambahays* (domestic helpers).

In his rambling speech in Kidapawan City, attended by many young Muslim girls and women, Duterte shocked the entire polite and civilized world by recounting to his audience how he sexually assaulted their housemaid when he was teenager. Duterte “telegraphed his punches,” so to speak; and we were horrified by what we saw in his heart and mind. By disrespecting our women, Duterte might have put millions of Filipina-OFWs in danger. For how will their male foreign employers respect them, if their own president back home treats them like rags?

The ancient Greeks said that destiny is character. For one’s fate is not determined by outside forces or fortune but by one’s essence. Whatever one accomplishes in life, good or bad, springs from one’s inner core. Good deeds come from the good soul; just as good fruits come from good trees.

How will future historians judge Duterte as a leader of this nation? Historians will judge him on the basis of his character. They will ask someday: What manner of man was he? For, in the end, what makes one a great President or a mediocre President is one’s persona, not his earthly achievements.

Ramon Magsaysay is a great Filipino President not because he accomplished much in terms of governance. He is a great leader because he truly loved his people, especially the poor and the downtrodden. And his love and devotion to the Filipino nation flowed out of the pure substance of the man.

He is the original and authentic *Man of the Masses*.

Certainly, in his twenty-one-year rule, Marcos had built more highways and schoolrooms than Magsaysay; but Marcos is not a good leader. In fact, Marcos is a bad President, contrary to Duterte’s cynical declaration that he is great. For

Marcos fooled his people; he corrupted them; he robbed them, and worse, as Maboloc said, he made off with their “political soul.”

The difference between Magsaysay and Marcos boils down to the difference of their individual personae. Material achievements matter if, and only if, they are the function of a good moral character; otherwise, they weigh lightly in the balance of life.

Future historians will find it easy to render judgment on Duterte’s presidency and his place in Philippine history. For whatever evidence they will need to make an objective appraisal of his person and presidency, based on his moral character, is well-documented – easily available and downloadable.

We have argued that history is already happening now. History is in the making; it is now being recorded in real time. All things considered, historians will judge Duterte by the force of his own words uttered in the seamless sound bites and media algorithms. Will he be judged a good leader or will he be judged otherwise? You have the evidence; so, ye be the judge.

Conclusion

Kant famously said that the human intellect cannot know *the-thing-in-itself*. All it can know are the phenomena, not the noumenon (*das Ding an sich*). For, as we have earlier pointed out, *reality* as such is empty of content.

What we can only apprehend in our feeble minds, F. H. Bradley holds, are mere “appearances,” not *reality* itself. For him, “appearances” are the “filtered” data perceived by the human mind through the grid of culture, language, space, and time. The “*reality*” which we grasp is the “gridded” form of *das Ding an sich*, since they are contingent on the faculties of the human mind.

Although the intellect apprehends the “appearances” or phenomena, it is unable to penetrate the realm of the noumenon.

Bradley maintains that *reality* is already present in its “appearances” “in different degrees and with diverse values.”¹⁰²

Note the phrase, “in different degrees and with diverse values.”

We have pointed out that the historical narrative of a critico-scientific historian – if it is a reliable account of history – must come close, in spirit and substance, to historical truth embodied in the network of solid facts. In fine, historical truth – the objective *hanging-togetherness* of things and events – is the constant variable in historical interpretation and reenactment.

It is the historian’s reconstruction of the past based on the interpretation of evidence that will be judged true or false. In dealing with evidence, a historian will do well to take into account what David Hume said that “[i]n our reasonings concerning matter of fact, there are all imaginable degrees of assurance, from the highest certainty to the lowest species of moral evidence[,] [a] wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence.”¹⁰³

There will be divergent accounts of history, since historians differ in standpoints, interests, and methods. But the criterion with which to judge a particular historical narrative will always depend on how close it approximates – “in different degrees and with diverse values” – to historical truth.

But then, another philosophical question arises as to *who* will determine whether one account is nearer to the truth than another. We do not offer here an answer to the question. But we would like to point out – keeping in mind, above all, that we have an ethical commitment to historical truth – that there should be a continued debate and exchange of ideas on matters respecting our history.

¹⁰² F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality: A Metaphysical Essay* (1897; repr., Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 2002), 551.

¹⁰³ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2007), Section X, 4.

Before we bring this essay to conclusion, we would like to make some brief remarks on a subject of primary importance in our history as a nation: the Philippine EDSA Revolution.

Maboloc argues, in a rather dismissive fashion, that “EDSA . . . was a failure;” that it did not give the Filipinos “the power of the purse and the ability to determine for themselves their fate as a people;” and that “Cory, simply restored the old order and returned to the oligarchy the control of the economy.”¹⁰⁴

This author as a nineteen-year-old man participated in the historic People Power uprising in EDSA.

I do not know if Maboloc was there in EDSA. But for me, along with my classmates, who took part in that Revolution, his rather flippant commentary on that historic event cuts to the quick.

He is suggesting that the cause for which I, my classmates, and the millions of Filipinos fought in February 1986 is a lost case.

My classmates and I did not go to EDSA with a clear and conscious idea to retrieve our nation’s “power of the purse” and our right for self-determination as a people. We went there to join the great masses of Filipinos to express our angry protest against the dictator and support the rebels led by Ramos and Enrile.

At the time, we really did not know – and certainly we did not have any way of knowing – that we were taking part in a watershed event in our history. That it turned out to be a Revolution was beyond the wildest expectations and imagination of the participants who were swept away, as it were, by the torrent of events that carried the nation to the shimmering sea of freedom.

¹⁰⁴ Maboloc, “*Situating the Mindanao Agenda*,” 8.

If there was *anything* that EDSA Revolution achieved, it was the dismantling of Marcos's tyranny. Even for *that* achievement alone – and it was a historic triumph – the EDSA Revolution was a success of epic proportions.

EDSA was the moment when we Filipinos showed the world that we are capable as a nation of reaching the heights of greatness and of making radical changes in society in a peaceful manner. In every respect, it was an authentic revolution in which People Power alone accomplished the feat in a spontaneous, majestic, and orchestric outpouring of unity, strength, and courage.

The 1789 French Revolution, one of the bloodiest in human history, was not initiated by the toiling and moiling masses: the peasants and the sans-culottes. Alexis de Tocqueville points out that it was the French aristocracy who revolted against King Louis XVI, not because they were animated by the noble ideals of the Enlightenment; but because they were aghast that their centuries-old tax-exception privilege was revoked by the State.¹⁰⁵

In contrast, the great 1986 February event was a real uprising of the Filipino people, represented in EDSA by the multitude coming from all walks of life, who seized the historic moment that led to the fall of the dictator.

Recall that EDSA Revolution was preceded by the 1986 Presidential Election in which Marcos lost but, as was his wont, cheated his opponent by using all the powerful machineries at his disposal. For the longest time, the Filipinos did not have any recourse to redress the abuses, sufferings, and hardships they had endured under Martial Law because Marcos controlled the media, the Parliament, the Judiciary, “the purse,” and the military.

EDSA was that finest hour in our history when the long-suffering people took matters into their own hands and claimed back their rights and freedoms. To expect that EDSA Revolution should bring us the graces and blessings of the Promise Land is a misplaced and deluded supposition.

¹⁰⁵ See Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, trans. John Bonner (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856).

Yes, it did dismantle the Marcos dictatorship; and it did bring back our freedom. But it did not reward us with economic progress and political maturity. Nevertheless, this fact does not dim in any way the historic significance of EDSA. For the EDSA Revolution was like the Israelites' crossing of the Red Sea—a most meaningful episode in their history because it signaled their escape from the grip of Pharaoh's despotism. But after the crossing of the Red Sea, the wilderness and the unknown awaited them.

It seems that our nation is still wandering in the wilderness; but slowly, and with great effort, it approaches the sunny uplands of progress and prosperity.

It is not the fault of EDSA as a revolution – or Cory Aquino – if, until now, we as a nation still do not enjoy economic stability and political maturity. **If** there was any failure at all, the fault lies not in that historic event. The fault lies in us as a people. “The fault, dear [Juan], is not in our stars; but in ourselves, that we are underlings.”

Historical perspective is important in assessing a revolution like EDSA. The reader may recall that the assault of the Bastille signaled the beginning of the French Revolution. In memory of that event, the 14th of July in France is celebrated as *Fête Nationale* with overflowing *dignité, grandeur, and élégance*.

The 1789 French Revolution did not immediately realize the ideals of *liberté, égalité, and fraternité*. In fact, that Revolution was followed by the reign of despotism, factionalism, anarchy – and the bloody persecutions of the royalists, the former associates of the Revolution, and the alleged enemies of the First Republic.

The militants of the Revolution – remember Maximilien Robespierre, the most prominent figure of the infamous *La Terreur?* – who professed to be the defenders of freedom and equality instigated the infamous Reign of Terror which consumed France in a horrific conflagration of cruelty and carnage – all in the cause of liberty, all in the name of the First Republic.

It took five Republics – I repeat five – for the French politics and democratic governance to stabilize. And yet, even today, more than 200 years after the 1789 Revolution, present-day historians are still debating its historical meaning and impact.

When a French correspondent asked Zhou Enlai, the Chinese Prime Minister, what he thought of the 1789 French Revolution, the latter said that “[i]t is too early to tell.”¹⁰⁶ That incident was in 1953, 164 years after the Revolution – when the Chinese Premier was in Geneva for peace talks to end the Korean War.

It has only been thirty-four years since the 1986 EDSA Revolution unfolded in our history. And yet, without the benefit of historical insight and perspective, Maboloc judged it to be a complete failure. He should have waited, at least, one hundred years to render his judgement.

Incidentally, Maboloc tells us that the rise of Duterte was “a revolution from below,”¹⁰⁷ a “revolution from the South.”¹⁰⁸ No, it is not. Firstly, the 16 million voters who elected Duterte in a clean democratic process were not all from the South. They were from all over the country – from Jolo, to Tablas, to Aparri.

Secondly, we seriously doubt that the Duterte “phenomenon” was a “revolution” in the same sense and magnitude as that of the 1789 French Revolution, the 1917 Russian Revolution, and the 1986 EDSA Revolution. A peaceful or violent revolution is an event that brings about sweeping changes in the political and social order of a nation. But what has the Duterte government achieved so far? Let us lay aside the present economic condition of the country because of the Covid-19 pandemic. No fault of Duterte.

What about his brutal campaign on illegal drugs? How has he performed so far? After three months since he started his war on illegal drugs, Duterte asked

¹⁰⁶ Maximilien Robespierre, *Virtue and Terror*, ed. Jean Ducange, trans. John Howe, *Introduction* by Slavoj Žižek (London: Verso, 2017), vii.

¹⁰⁷ Maboloc, “*Situating the Mindanao Agenda*,” 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

for a six-month extension, realizing that he simply could not fulfil his promise to solve the drug problem in the country in the span of six months. He said:

I didn't have any idea that there were hundreds of thousands of people already in the drug business. And what makes it worse is that they are operated now by people in government, especially those in elected positions. So, it would be government versus government."¹⁰⁹

Really? He did not know? He embarked on a war without having any notion about the strength of the enemy?

But, okay, the nation gave him a six-month extension.

Now, three years into his term, in April 2019, he himself declared that his bloody campaign was a failure. His words:

You can read it every day, even in the crawler of the TV networks. There are billions worth of drugs. Before, it was only thousands. Drugs, I cannot control, *putang ina*, even if I ordered the deaths of these idiots.¹¹⁰

There you are. After eviscerating thousands of poor Filipinos in a *Kill-Kill-Kill* campaign, we are nowhere remotely close to solving the country's drug problem. Not one bigtime drug lord has so far been apprehended and prosecuted.

Duterte's rise to power is not even a mini-revolution, something that "Isko" Moreno, the Mayor of Manila, accomplished when he cleaned up the city.

A revolution? *Nah*. It's more like the *sirit ng watusi*.

¹⁰⁹ Watch and listen to Duterte's own words: <https://www.rappler.com/nation/duterte-6-months-extension-war-drugs>, (accessed November 29, 2020).

¹¹⁰ Ralph Villanueva, "Duterte: Drug war failed," *The Manila Times*, April 4, 2019.

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