

THE MAKING OF A FILIPINO PHILOSOPHER¹

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Introduction

I readily accepted the invitation to read a paper in PHAVISMINDA conference because the theme, "Doing Philosophy in the Philippine Context," is close to my heart. On 16-19 February 2004, an international conference on the theme, "Teaching Philosophy in the Asian Context," was held at the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City. It was sponsored by Institut Missio (Germany), the Asian Christian Higher Education Institute of the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia (Hong Kong), and the Ateneo de Manila University (Manila). The paper I submitted there was titled "My philosophical development." It talks about how I shifted my philosophical focus from Western philosophy to Filipino philosophy and the reasons behind the shift. It was published in 2004a as an appendix of my book *Filipino philosophy: Traditional approach*, Part I, Section 2.

During the 21st World Congress of Philosophy, held at Istanbul, Turkey on 10-13 August 2003, I presented the paper "Is there a Filipino philosophy?" (2006). I distinguished three approaches to Filipino philosophy, viz., traditional, cultural, and national. I also tried briefly to shed light on what it means to be a true philosopher.

Since then I had various papers dealing with Filipino philosophy in the traditional approach, aside from the two books I have written on the matter.³ It is *traditional* in the sense that it is the tradition used in histories of philosophy. It began as far back as Thales. Here historians of philosophy enumerate the philosophers of different countries—as in Greek philosophy, British philosophy, French philosophy, etc., and discuss their respective philosophies. In the paper which I read in Athens, Greece on 2 June 2006 entitled "Filipino philosophy: A Western tradition in an Eastern setting," I discussed the historical development of traditional Filipino philosophy. Although incomplete, it was relatively extensive as it discussed ten Filipino

philosophers: five from the past (1870-1950), three from the recent contemporary period (1951-1980), and two from the current contemporary period (1981-onwards).⁴

In this paper, I want to dwell on how one can *become* a Filipino philosopher.

BASIC FACTS

Last 28 December 2006, I presented the paper, "The concept of the public good: A preliminary view from a Filipino philosopher," during the conference of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association in Washington, D. C. I was a Visiting Research Professor at the Catholic University of America from 20 September to 20 November 2006. I left the United States on 12 December 2006 because beyond this date, all Northwest Airlines flights for Manila up to 31 December 2006 were fully booked. Professor John Abbarno (2007), president of the Conference of Philosophical Societies, who invited me to deliver a paper in an Asian panel of the APA conference, read the paper for me, and in an email, reported that my paper was "well received."⁵ Another professor, Dr. Vincent Shen (2007), who teaches in Ontario, Canada and who also read a paper in the same panel, emailed me that the participants' reactions to my paper were positive in that I succeeded in merging the private (business firms) and the public (government or the state) in my discussion of the public good. I cite this paper to bring to our attention the subject matter ("public good") and the author ("Filipino philosopher").

What, then, are our basic facts?

Filipino Philosophy

First, there is Filipino philosophy. However, do not think that every Filipino teacher of philosophy agrees with this statement. Even as late as 19 September 2006, during the meeting of the CHED Technical Committee on Philosophy at Shangrila Hotel, my colleagues there had only a very hazy idea about the content of Filipino philosophy that I had to remark, "If you read my works, then you will know that there is such a thing as Filipino philosophy." I am not even sure that every participant of this Seminar has read my works on Filipino philosophy. I have written three books, an extensive bibliography, and several articles on the subject Filipino philosophy delivered in local and foreign philosophical conferences. Most of them are published and are found in my website: <http://mysite.dlsu.edu.ph/faculty/gripaldo/index.asp>.⁶



When I speak of *Filipino philosophy*, I do not mean the approach used by Leonardo Mercado and Florentino Timbreza, which I call the “cultural approach” (CA) in that they attempted to extract, as it were, the philosophical underpinnings or presuppositions of a people’s culture as culled from their languages, folksongs, folk literature, folk sayings, and so on.⁷ Although this approach in itself is a significant contribution to the development of the philosophical landscape of the Philippines, it should not be confused with the *traditional* usage of the term “Filipino philosophy” (TA) as used by historians of philosophy. Open any book on a history of Western philosophy and you will “see” what I mean. We can also find a list of Eastern philosophers of India, China, Japan, and South Korea from the Internet.⁸ So it must go likewise for Filipino philosophers.

In the traditional approach, our first philosophers were Enlightenment thinkers, in that they were influenced by the European Enlightenment. The Enlightenment movement of the 18th century in Central Europe traveled to Spain in the first half of the 19th century and reached the Philippines in the second half of that century. Jose Rizal, who bought all the works of Voltaire, was an Enlightenment thinker. He subscribed to the ideas of the Enlightenment: the dominance of *reason* with its capacity to emancipate mankind from its woes; the primacy of education as a tool for enlightenment; the inevitability of progress brought about by science and technology; the deistic belief that God created the universe with the laws of nature and left it perfectly working by itself, never to interfere with it again; the confidence that man can solve all his problems because these are humanly, not divinely, created; and the like. Emilio Jacinto was influenced by the Enlightenment idea of intellectual liberty as primary in a situation where volitional liberty is suppressed and debased while Andres Bonifacio, by the Enlightenment idea of the social contract, developed his own version. He converted the blood compact into a *kinship* contract between the Spaniards and the native Filipinos. He advocated the view that a revolution is justified when there is a breach of contract.

Filipino Philosopher

Second, we have Filipino philosophers. However, there are only a few of them. Most of them or us are just *teachers* of philosophy or just *scholars* of philosophy. We have not yet graduated to become a genuine philosopher. We master a philosopher—say, Immanuel Kant, St. Thomas Aquinas, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Plato—or we specialize in a branch of philosophy—say, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy of religion, or metaphysics. We try to learn a little of the other branches of philosophy in order to be

able to relate those ideas with the ideas in our specialization. In other cases, we simply do not read some schools or traditions of philosophy, which we consider either as not genuine philosophy or are so technical for our understanding to fathom as in the philosophy of mathematics. But hardly if ever do we reflect or philosophize on our own.

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

Many of us are like this Kantian. We become Nietzschean or Heideggerian or Rortyan through and through. We forget about our own independence of mind. We forget that we can innovate or tread a new path. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1841) teaches that one should be an independent intellectual because to imitate is suicide. If all one's life is just to become a Kantian, or to mimic Kant, then in effect he or she is an *intellectual suicide*. Bertrand Russell and G. E. Moore were *young Hegelians* (White 1955, 13, 17) but eventually they rejected Hegel and formulated their own individual philosophies. Plotinus studied Plato but he did not end up just becoming a Platonist; he made a novel approach to Plato and become a neo-Platonist. It is said that Plato's immediate successor in the Academy was a Platonist⁹ but, unlike Aristotle, he was easily forgotten or taken for granted in history.

In contemporary times, we can cite Alfred North Whitehead, who became a neo-Heraclitean by affirming the reality of the Heraclitean flux while employing the results of modern physics, and Claro R. Ceniza, who became a neo-Parmenidean when he tried to reconcile the views of Parmenides on the One and Heraclitus on the Many.

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

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

SUBJECT MATTER: CONTENTS OF FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY (TA)

What does it mean to relate philosophy to the Philippine setting? What does the theme—"Doing Philosophy in the Philippine Context"—signify?

Philosophy and Culture

There is no denying that the Filipino has a cultural setting, and philosophy (TA) in this regard can contextually arise from culture. There is a symbiotic relationship between culture and philosophy. Culture influences philosophy as philosophy transforms culture (see Gripaldo 1994-95, 101-112). Perhaps, we can say the same with science and culture and speak about the scientific culture. In the Philippines, we lagged behind many countries, particularly South Korea which was behind us in the 1960s, in developing a vibrant scientific and philosophical culture. We establish the Philosophical Association of the Philippines in 1973, far way ahead of South Korea, but South Korea has overtaken us by becoming a member of the International Federation of Philosophical Societies and will now hold the 22nd World Congress of Philosophy in Seoul in August 2008. Where did the Filipinos fail?

Easy Contented Life

Generally, the Filipinos are a happy people. Surveys (see Shead 2001-2005 and Pascual Jr. 2003) have shown how they can easily manage to smile in the midst of suffering and difficulties or in spite of their poverty. This is said to be an admirable trait, but it can also be deleterious to the idea of progress or improvement. In a manner of speaking, "Mababaw ang kaligayahan ng pinoy." He is generally easily contented to be able to eat three times a day because in the world there are many people who can hardly eat, or had eaten only once or twice a day.

The drive for excellence and professional growth is generally lacking among many Filipino professionals and academics. Once they become permanent and have sufficient financial security of employment, they tend to become lax and content with their situation. For many of them, the drive for excellence tapers and their careers plateau. Many of those with Master's degrees seem not to have the zest anymore for finishing their Ph.D.s. They attend to many activities other than excellence in their respective professional careers. In philosophy, one can either be an excellent scholar

or an excellent philosopher. Although one can be both, it is best not to stop at just being a scholar, but to become a philosopher himself or herself.

Philosophical Association of the Philippines (PAP)

The same situation can be said of the Philosophical Association of Philippines. Established in the 1970s, it did not have the grand vision of regularly circulating as an association in philosophical activities outside of the country. It held national seminars but it did not even publish its proceedings nor did it publish a philosophical journal. Moreover, it did not aspire to become a member of the FISP, which demands of a prospective member that the philosophical association should have a regular minimum membership of one hundred, a tradition of scholarly publications, and an annual FISP membership of \$200.

The PAP was content with just holding an annual seminar and a mid-year seminar. Its income is spent in monthly meetings rather than in financing publications. Year in and year out, PAP holds annual seminars and midyear seminars and spend the money in preparation for the following year's seminars. What for? It has an *absurd existence*, like that of Sisyphus rolling the rock up the hill without genuinely succeeding. The rock rolls down the hill and Sisyphus rolls it back again.

We need to revitalize the PAP and steps have been taken towards this direction. PAP has just published the second volume of its conference proceedings. It has adopted and participated in the publication and distribution of *Filosofia: International Journal of Philosophy*, which is abstracted in *The Philosopher's Index*, Bowling Green, Ohio. It has tied up with the Philippine National Philosophical Research Society (PNPRS) and the Philosophical Association of Northern Luzon (PANL). PAP will certainly be happy if the Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao, like PNPRS and PANL, will become an institutional member of PAP and will adopt *Filosofia* as its national journal. In this way, PAP's membership will be augmented. Soon it will apply for membership to FISP, and hopefully in five year's time, in 2013, PAP can bid to host the 24th World Congress of Philosophy for 2018.

Content of Filipino Philosophy (TA)

If we go beyond being simply a scholar and aspire to become a philosopher worthy to be acknowledged as such in the world, then we need to recognize that we are first and foremost a Filipino whose nationality is defined in the Philippine Constitution of 1987 and who has lived in a native cultural setting for a long time. Earlier, I cited an analysis of the "concept of



the public good” as a subject of philosophizing. The philosophical import of the argument here is that a philosophy is defined by the nationality of the philosopher regardless of the subject matter wherein he or she does his or her philosophizing. The important thing in philosophizing is not simply *tangential* philosophical reflections but *substantial* philosophical innovations that could have ramifications in the philosophical world.

Western Philosophical Orientation

We need also to recognize that any cultural setting is rooted in history. Culture over time is history. If we look back in our history, it is not difficult to see the beginnings of our philosophical development as a part of our cultural heritage. Its ferment occurred during the Propaganda Movement. This was the period of Filipino awakening, philosophically speaking. And that Movement was heavily influenced by the 18th-century European Enlightenment. So necessarily, our philosophical beginnings and our developmental trajectory is influenced by a Western orientation. If we examine what is going on in philosophy in the Philippines today, it is basically Western in outlook with some occasional pockets of what is known as the Oriental outlook. The bibliography (see Gripaldo 2000, 2004d) I gathered on Filipino philosophical writings from 1774 to the present will attest to this Western leaning.

Most, if not all, of the traditional and contemporary issues in Western philosophy are the issues and contents of Filipino philosophical writings. However, most of these writings are not innovative but basically expository with some reflections in them. What we need are philosophical innovations that are distinctively the product of profound philosophical minds, something that will separate one's thoughts from the thoughts of others before him or her. And I think this is one of the great challenges of a would-be Filipino philosopher.

Philosophical Extractions from Filipino Culture

A cultural rethinking of Filipino philosophy is important, but it should be a philosophical reflection of our existing culture as a whole or of our individual cultural traits. Except probably one or two traits, many Filipino cultural traits are ambivalent: they can be used for good or for bad. At least two initial works on this trend of analysis can be mentioned. One was edited by Manuel Dy (1994) and the other edited by me (2005). Both were published in America by the Council for Research in Values and Philosophy.

What is objectionable is when a philosophy researcher simply studies Filipino works in literature, songs, and the like, and then extract philosophical ideas or themes therein, and then declare that *that* is “Filipino philosophy.” Although this activity of philosophical extraction from culture is in itself significant, it is *essentially* a social scientific activity, as done by anthropologists, sociologists, social psychologists, and the like. William Graham Sumner, an American sociologist, does this activity in his *Folkways* (1906, 1960). Filipino writers such as Leonardo Mercado (1974, 1994), Florentino Timbreza (1982), Virgilio Enriquez (1988), and F. Landa Jocano (1997), among others, do this in their works.¹⁰ What is objectionable is the argument to the effect, “This is the way things are. This *is* the way Filipinos do behave. Therefore, this is the way Filipinos *ought* to behave, culturally speaking.” Sumner (1906; 1960, 45, 49) rejects philosophy in that it is counterfactual as if we philosophers cannot make innovations on the existing culture. Ethics, for example, is the study of what ought to be. Philosophers propose it as a better alternative to the what *is*, that is, to the existing morality (the existing mores). Headhunters should cut heads during the hunting season. This is the mores. Philosophers say it is bad and *ought* to be abandoned. *Pakikisama*, for example, is good in some situations, but it is bad in other situations when one is forced to go with the group’s unpleasant objectives at the expense of some noble objectives (see Dante 2004 and Quito 1988). And we have a number of cases where *pakikisama* is used for bad purposes and should be abandoned in those cases. This is the type of *philosophical analysis* that is *philosophically* productive, not the type of Sumnerian *descriptive analysis* that is, of course, *scientifically* productive.

But we need to graduate from this kind of piecemeal analysis. It is important to have a holistic philosophy of culture similar to the one done by Jean Ladriere (1994), a French philosopher, and Richard Taylor (2000), a Canadian philosopher. Ladriere discusses the symbiotic relationship between culture and philosophy while Taylor holds that culture is the ground of human existence.

Why I Shifted to the Study of Filipino Philosophy

I want to reiterate some aspects of my earlier mentioned paper “My philosophical development.”

My training and education in undergraduate philosophy was relatively exhaustive. Most of my teachers at the Mindanao State University were American peace corps volunteers who introduced me to symbolic logic; aesthetics; history of Western philosophy; and contemporary philosophy, such as the analytic tradition, existentialism, phenomenology, pragmatism,



process philosophy, and Marxist humanism, among others. My Filipino philosophy teachers had introduced me to ethics, logic and language, metaphysics, and the principles and methods of science. In my Master's degree, I concentrated on the Philosophy of Language because that was the first philosophy of the analytic tradition in the 1980s and my philosophical temperament was attuned to this tradition. I taught for almost a decade varied philosophy subjects, including areas which I did not formally study in college but which I studied on my own, such as Japanese philosophy, Chinese philosophy, Indian philosophy, philosophy of education, philosophy of person, and philosophy of history, among others. I have read works here and there of Filipino philosophy in the traditional sense: a few articles, books, and Master's theses. My exposure to nationalist ideas also helped me in forming a decision to concentrate on Filipino philosophy for a doctoral study. I had been exposed to philosophical ideas from the outside.

I thought it was high time that I look inward and study our own. I believed we have Filipino philosophy in the same sense as Greek, British, or French philosophy. Those who told me there was no such thing as Filipino philosophy were, to my mind, charlatans. When asked if they had done research on the subject matter, they readily admitted in the negative, and in an *argumentum-ad-ignorantiam* fashion declared that it was not worth studying because there was no such thing. For almost three decades now I have extensively written about this subject matter and produced four books, including a bibliography, and several articles. My background in Western philosophy and my studies in Oriental philosophy were enough training and materiel to know what to look for in the writings of Filipino thinkers. Moreover, a good working background on Western and Eastern thought is also *generally* important in becoming a world-class philosopher.

At this juncture, it might be argued that what I am doing is still extractive in nature. That is true, but the philosophical ideas or systems of thought that a historian of philosophy extracts come from the works of an individual thinker, not from a cultural group. This is an important difference between the traditional and cultural approaches to philosophy. The *traditional approach* has a long tradition in the history of philosophy, dating as far back as Thales. The *cultural approach* is a phenomenon of the 20th century.

Do I have my own philosophy? The answer is affirmative although I have not yet written it in one book, but scattered in various works. If you have read my book *Circumstantialism* (1977) and my works on the theory of speech acts (2003) where I ontologically rejected the logical term *proposition*, on the public good (2006a), on the philosophy of media (2006d), etc., then

you will know that I have a philosophy, but its overall picture is still developing. In due time, I intend to write a volume or two about my own comprehensive systematic philosophy. After all, our *task* is to make ourselves philosophers, not just teachers or scholars of philosophy.

FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY AND THE WORLD

We have to situate Filipino philosophy (TA) in world history. Outside the Philippines, we are known as a “nation of nannies”¹¹ or a nation of “hewers of wood [and] drawers of water.”¹² Partly because these are the highly visible commodities in the Middle East, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Our domestic helpers, caregivers, entertainers, drivers, and labor workers are usually featured in world news. Partly because very little is known about our sailors, engineers, nurses, doctors, teachers, computer scientists, and the like. There are 4.5 million Filipinos in the United States (“Overseas Filipinos,” n.d.) and, according to a CNN report, the second richest ethnic group in America, after the Indians, are the Filipinos.¹³

When it comes to Filipino philosophy scholars and philosophers making a dent in world philosophy circles, it is virtually zero. Every now and then this minority group read papers in world philosophy conferences. But many of their counterparts in Asia, like the South Koreans, the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Indians were there in droves reading different papers. In the World Congress on Mulla Sadra held in Tehran in 1999, I was the only Filipino there who read a paper on the theory of speech acts. In the 21st World Congress of Philosophy held in Istanbul in 2003 only two Filipinos presented papers. There were also two Filipinos who delivered papers in the philosophy conference in Athens in June 2006,¹⁴ and I was the only Filipino who presented a paper in the American Philosophical Association Conference held in December 2006 in Washington, D. C. No doubt, there are some among you who read papers in world philosophy conferences alone.

My point here is that we Filipino scholars and philosophers are talented. We can face the philosophy world with confidence and with a high standard of scholarship or philosophizing. We need world exposure, and we need to help each other fulfill this exposure. Instead of competing among ourselves locally and trying to outsmart each other, or trying to brag which department of philosophy or which philosophical association is the best, and in the process pull each other down, we need to cooperate and pull each other up. The task of showing the world that we have a vibrant umbrella philosophy organization—the PAP—worthy of world respect and



that we have world class philosophy scholars and philosophers is in our hands.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I want to emphasize it is high time that we Filipino teachers and scholars of philosophy should not lose sight of the goal not only of converting ourselves into philosophers but also of aspiring to become world-class philosophers. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to concentrate in either attempting to innovate on the ideas of one's own favorite philosopher, or discard one's favorite philosopher and reflectively create a new way of thinking and of analyzing things, or re-examine old and new philosophical issues and offer a profound solution to any of these issues. Moreover, we need to help each other in sharing one's views to the philosophical world where the real competition for recognition as a world-class philosopher really matters.

NOTES

1. Paper presented on 27 May 2007 at Silliman University, Dumaguete City in the philosophical conference sponsored by the Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao.

2. Professor R. Gripaldo is the chair of the DLSU Philosophy Department, the former dean of the Mindanao State University College of Arts and Humanities, and the former president of the Philosophical Association of the Visayas and Mindanao.

3. The first book on Filipino traditional philosophy appeared in 2000 and was reprinted in 2004a while the second book appeared in 2004b.

4. Philosophers cited in the books (2004a and 2004b) are: from 1870-1950—Rizal, Bonifacio, Jacinto, Quezon, and Laurel; 1951-1980—Constantino, Embuscado, and Gripaldo; 1981-onwards—Bautista and Ceniza.

5. Here is the exact quote from Professor John Abbarno (2007): "The paper was well received. There were others read so we were limited on discussion. I thank you again for your preparing this with such late notice."

6. Alternatively, you can type "Rolando Gripaldo" in the yahoo search engine and the website will appear in the list of items.

7. In Africa—in particular in Nigeria—cultural philosophy is called traditional philosophy or ethnophilosophy since it is extracted from ethnic tribes, specifically, the Yoruba and others. See Udefi (2007).

8. For a relatively comprehensive list of Eastern philosophers, see *Wikipedia*, n.d.

9. Speusippus adhered to the philosophy of Plato. Though he rejected the World of Forms, he did not make a significant innovation in Plato's philosophy (see *Wikipedia*, n.d.).

10. Florentino Timbreza is not a sociologist but an ethnophilosophy scholar.

11. See the remarks of Ms. Quigaman (2005) when she was interviewed during the Miss International Beauty Pageant in Tokyo.

12. Paul Krugman (n.d.) describes the Filipino poor, the majority of the Filipinos, and other Third World workers in this marginalistic, lowly way.

13. Cited by Noel Tan (2007) in a sermon at the Bread of Life Ministry, Greenbelt I, Makati City, 3 March.

14. In Istanbul, Dr. Corazon Torralba of the University of Asia and the Pacific and I presented papers while in Athens, Dean M. L. M. Festin of San Carlos Seminary and I read papers.

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