

# FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY: WHY NOT? \*REFLECTIONS ON A FILIPINO PHILOSOPHY OF TIME\*

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## Introduction

"Is there a Filipino philosophy?" This question has become recurrent despite the presence of literature on Filipino philosophy. What are they looking for in Filipino philosophy? If they are looking for philosophy written by a Filipino, the answer is "yes." Are they perhaps looking for philosophy of Filipino that is distinctively and typically Filipino in method and insight? This last question is a call to reflection for three reasons. Firstly, deep understanding of reality is not colored. Wisdom is not German or American, Chinese or Filipino. Rather it is simply human wisdom<sup>1</sup> for though a man does not philosophize in a vacuum, he nevertheless philosophizes not as an Italian, an American, an Indian or a Filipino. Perhaps this is what Romualdo Abulad means when he says "If the mind is without gender, so has philosophy no nationality."<sup>2</sup> Secondly, if there is Filipino Philosophy, what makes it Filipino and not simply philosophy? Finally, is doing Filipino philosophy deliberate or should the identification of this philosophy be left to the "judgment of time?"

What, then, is the *raison d'être* of an academic subject called Filipino Philosophy? Does it exist to answer the question "Is there a Filipino philosophy?" And to find out if there is a philosophy of a Filipino that is typically Filipino in method and insight? Or, is it a study of the Filipino's profound understanding of reality without the Filipino-self-consciousness that he is philosophizing as a Filipino?

There are significant reasons for undertaking this study. First, if the degree of literacy is the gauge of a people's cultural development, then, intellectual achievement is its measure of cultural superiority. If philosophy is the ultimate intellectual achievement,<sup>3</sup> then, a people's philosophy finds for a country its distinctive place in the global community of cultures. Second, if there is indeed a Filipino philosophy, then, its presence is a booster to the Filipino morale.

Two “things” that serve as background of this article need a thorough discussion but time and space constraint come in the way. These “things” are the meaning of philosophy that is universally applicable and the signification of the term *Filipino*. The first is clarified in Abulad’s article “Options for a Filipino Philosophy.”<sup>4</sup> The second is clear in the Philippine Constitution.

The following remarks regarding the term *Filipino* will hopefully suffice. Aside from its historically nominal meaning, *Filipino* is the name of a multi-lingual-speaking people inhabiting a group of islands to the west of Pacific Ocean, identified as Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao comprising the Philippines. It is not easy to be precise about who the original Filipino really is. In the light of this impreciseness, what is called Filipino culture will have to include the humanistic achievements of tribal minorities, highland and lowland, past and present Filipinos. Hence, any philosophizing on the Filipino reality by a Filipino will have to reckon with a diversely rich Filipino culture.

Besides, the wonder experienced by a Filipino mind encompasses everything that he feels as Filipino. He is intrigued by what it is to be a human being. He is fascinated by the world wherein he dwells. He marvels at its beauty and trembles at its might. He queries about how he is to sustain his life, how to think and act, how and why he ought to live a good life. All these inquiries and many more, such as what it means to be, occupy the Filipino appreciating and wondering mind. Some of these wonderings find expression in songs, artistic design of a native’s *malong*, dances, such as *tinikling* (Tikling is a bird) and *itik-itik* (itik is a duck) and, *balitaw* (a flirt dance), to mention some angles of Filipino culture. And finally, this Filipino amazement will somehow capture a common feeling, desire, aspiration, world-view – a commonality that incarnates the Filipino soul – and thereby constitutes Filipino Philosophy.

These wonderings roughly give us the western division of philosophy, namely, Philosophical Anthropology (Philosophy of the Human Person, today), Ethics, Logic, Aesthetics, Philosophy of Science, and Metaphysics. These disciplines that have already been thought out as ‘this division’ are not discounted for the simple reason of singling out Filipino philosophy in its distinctiveness. The Filipino does not go about proving God’s existence; so, in lieu of Theodicy there is Filipino Religiosity.



## Course Content of a Syllabus on Filipino

### Philosophy: A Proposal

Two approaches are possible in doing Filipino philosophy as a subject. These are the non-thematic and thematic approaches. The non-thematic may be historical and cultural. The western division of philosophy comes in handy using the thematic method. The following is a proposed course outline of a syllabus on this subject:

#### I. Introduction

Objectives: \*To establish the learning atmosphere conducive to doing philosophy

\*To show "Why Filipino Philosophy"

--Working description of Filipino Philosophy

--Options for Filipino Philosophy<sup>5</sup>

--Nature and Scope of Filipino Philosophy

--The Role of Filipino Philosophy in Filipino Psychology<sup>6</sup>

--The Filipino Thinkers and their Contribution to Filipino Philosophy

#### II. Philosophical Anthropology (*Ang Pagtuki sa Kinaiyaban sa Tawo*)

Objective: \*To comprehend the Filipino understanding of the "human being" and of "being human"

--Man (Tao)

--Intellect and Will (*Ang Pangisip ug ang Kabubut-on*)

--Being Human (*Magpakatao*)

--The Within (Self) and Fellowman (*Loob and Kapwa*)

--The Will to Live (*Ang Pagpakabuhì*)

#### III. Ethics (*Ang Pagsusi sa Buotang Kinabuhì*)

Objectives: \*To delve into the Filipino understanding of the 'good life'

\*To analyze the Filipino interpretation of morality

--Why Live the Good Life (*Nganong Katungdanan nga Magpuyo sa Buotang ug Maligdong Kinabuhì*)

--Filipino Values, Classic and Contemporary

--Budhi, Gaba, Karma, Katarungan

--Right and Duty (*Katungod ug Katungdanan*)

--*Sakop* Morality

--Double Standard Morality

--Split-Level Christianity<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. Logic (*Pag-usisa sa Tawhanong Panghunabuna*)

Objectives: \*To expose the working of the Filipino Mind

\*To appreciate the Filipino style of expressing his thoughts.

--The Filipino Way of Thinking

--Proverbs, Poetic Debate, Riddle (*Salawikain, Balagtasán, Bugtong*)

--Story-telling

V. Aesthetics (*Pamalandong sa Maanindot ug Maanyag*)

Objectives: \*To discover the beautiful through the Filipino eyes and ears

\*To be acquainted with the way Filipinos develop their creativity

--Beauty

--Art

--Leisure and Work

VI. Philosophy of Science (*Pagtugkad sa Kalibutan sa Tawo ug sa Tawhanong Kalibutan*)

Objective: \*To explicate the Filipino insight into the material universe from folk literature

--Myth, Legend (*Alamat*), Short Stories

VII. Metaphysics (*Pagka-Anaa ug ang Pagsubay Niini*)

Objective: \*To have an in-depth understanding of reality-as-such the way a Filipino experiences it

--Concept and Translation of Being

--Concept of Becoming

--Time and Space

--Evil

--Beautiful, True, Good

VIII. Filipino Religiosity (*Ang Pilipinong Matuobon*)

Objective: \*To expound on the Filipino Spirituality

--Idea of the Holy

--The Almighty

--Fate versus Faith

--Coping Power

It will be noted that some parts of this proposed course outline use Tagalog and Cebuano terms without indicating whether the term is Tagalog or Cebuano. The reasons are: first, to show that there is no regional discrimination in the study, and second, to avoid distraction in the flow of thought. It is in the classroom that the meanings of the terms are clarified, and that other terms, like Ilocano words, have a place in the study.

Given in this article is a part of the Section on Metaphysics. This part is Filipino philosophy of time (*panabon*).

Of the many things that surround man, one that defies full comprehension is time. Aristotle has classified time as one of the categories of being and defines it like any other manageable thing. St. Augustine, however, refers to it as something he knows provided no one asks him

what it is. Maybe the attempt to know the essence of time is not the issue. Perhaps the approach to time is to see its relevance in the life of human beings and to clarify man's stance towards it.

Among Filipinos one avenue towards a deep comprehension of time is proverb (*salawikain*, in Tagalog). Proverbs are pregnant reservoirs of insights into the richness of the Filipino experience of time. It is worth one's while looking into this avenue.

### The Proverbs

For want of space, only four proverbs (or words of wisdom) are tackled in this article.

*Ang hindi lumingon sa pinanggalingan*

*Ay di makararating sa paroroonan.*

(He who does not look back whence he came

Will not reach his destination.)<sup>8</sup>

The value that imposes itself on a reflective mind at the first reading of this proverb is *utang na loob* (Tagalog) or *utang kabubut-on* (Sugbuanon/Cebuano) or debt of gratitude. In fact, looking back to one's roots, recognizing one's original status in life, tipping-one's-hat to the people who made possible a person's success can challenge him to do his best for the attainment of his goal while evading the remembered stumbling-blocks.

Actually, significations of this proverb are numerous but the bottom-line is time. "*Lumingon sa pinanggalingan*" points to the "past" and "*paroroonan*" implies "ahead," something to reach at a "distance," at a later time, or in the future. And when is one to "look back" as he "moves forward?" Now, at the "present" time. This proverb tells of a subtle understanding of time as linear, that is, there is a movement from the past through the present to the future. It is subtle because this linearity is permeated by human time (to borrow Leonardo Mercado's words). Does this disprove Mercado's Filipino philosophy of time, as cyclical? No, because the proverb also implies a cycle; time as also spiral (again to borrow Mercado's word). A spiral movement involves cycles where every cycle is always one step higher than the preceding. The circularity in the cycle is signified in "*lumingon*," looking back in time, to relive the past somewhat, with gratitude to learn from it and be inspired by it in order to progress to the next "chapter" (cycle) in one's life. Not looking back and without a point of reference, he can lose his direction. Living is like driving a car—intent on a certain direction while glancing at the rear-view mirror (or side-mirror) now and then to avoid being hurt or hurting someone as he gains

ground. Or, living is like dancing the *Sinulog*—one step backward to go forward with two steps.

The Filipino experience of time as linear is clearer in the following saying (*panutihon* in Sugbuanon; *kasabihan* in Tagalog):

*Kung hibingi ang isang bata ng payong pambata  
Ibigay mo kung kaya sa bulsa  
Dabil minsan lang siyang bata.*

(When a child asks for a child's umbrella  
Give it to her if affordable  
Because she is just once a child.)

This "saying" tells of human existence as a fleeting progression. Human life goes on. A human person is not young forever. Yes, she may stay young at heart and mind; she may hold back physical aging but not for long. Like it or not, the child grows old. Youth comes but once. And when the child has grown up, she will no longer desire the child's umbrella, so that when denied she will have missed the innocent joy of having her own little umbrella. And then that part of her memory is experienced as hollow, since the time to be young goes as the time to be old comes.

A Belgian tour guide with a keen sense of humor, in response to some Filipino tourists' remark, commented: "Once we were young and beautiful, now we are only beautiful." Like this Belgian lady, the Filipino grasps time as that which is at the background of change. And time in this context does not recur. It moves on.

From the immediately preceding saying, a Filipino's awareness of the importance of time can be inferred. This insight is verifiable in the following *salawikain*.

*Aan'hin pa ang damo  
Kapag wala na ang kabayo.*

(Of what use is hay  
when the horse is no longer there.)

This proverb probably touches the problem of human relationship. But more to the point, it is a cipher (to borrow Karl Jaspers' term) to something profounder—time management. Procrastination is undeniably a "virus" that infects anyone who is vulnerable due to laziness or indifference or lack of regard and respect for the other's time or person. Perhaps the Filipino "ancients'" profound repulsion of this lack of regard for time's importance in the rampant practice of "*unya na lang*" (later on) has prompted them to "encode" the value of "timeliness" in this *salawikain*. As an aside, a Sugbuanon term *nayanaya* is misconstrued as *unya-unya*. Nonetheless, doing *nayanaya*<sup>d</sup> is not procrastination. It is simply taking-time to break the

momentum (of what is disturbing) with the end of strengthening the individual to face the inevitable.

However, although "procrastination" and "latecomerism" belie a Filipino recognition of time's importance, deep down inside, a Filipino does acknowledge it; and sometimes when it is already too late. The consequent tormented consciousness may somehow be cushioned by the thought that "*may bukas pa*" (there is still tomorrow) and yet this is as abruptly as a thunderbolt at midday, countered by a *Bisayan panulihon* "*walay pagbasol nga mag-una*" ("no regret comes first," literally translated).

The following is an attempt to concretize the timeless value of time signaled by the proverb above. A man needs help but the person concerned postpones the badly needed assistance, assuming that the "desperate" man is always there, waiting. When the help finally comes the "desperate" man is no longer there. This snag in human relationship has been expressed poetically in the phrase "too late the hero"; or dramatically exclaimed in a question, "Where were you when I needed you?" Thus this *salawikain* "*Aanhin pa ang damo kapag wala na ang kabayo*" poignantly exhorts not only perceptivity and *sensitivity* but also promptness. The urgency of the real need demands immediate response. Perhaps the help cannot be extended at once because it is not available. But this is not the point in the proverb. The point is the value of time, the urgency of the moment. And here once again, linearity in the Filipino time consciousness surreptitiously asserts itself, for why should anyone value the moment unless time moves on.

Linearity of time reasserts itself in its characteristic subtlety in the following words of wisdom:

*Ano man ang gawa sa matanda*

*Ay siya ring tama sa bata.*

(Whatever the old does  
is what is right for the child.)

This saying is currently brought to the attention of grown-ups in connection with the strict enforcement of traffic law. Over and beyond the beneficial intent of this *salawikain*, however, is its deep meaning that addresses the value of time.

The first reading of this proverb calls to mind the significance of modeling, that is, the power of good example. A second reading points to the root of this power, which is nowhere found but in the child's understanding that the "adult" knows better. The adult is ahead in years. Time has "presumably" transformed him from being ignorant to becoming knowledgeable. With the passage of time, experience shall have formed him in a manner whereby wisdom has assumed direction in his life.

Of course, the child may not explicitly think along this line. Yet it is implied in his very gesture of looking up to the adult for the knowledge about what is "*tama*" (right) and therefore can be done.

### Filipino Philosophy of Time

What then is this Filipino philosophy of time derivable from Filipino proverbs, like the *salawikains* analyzed in this article? A philosophical reflection on these sayings discloses a Filipino experience of time both as an individual and a social being. In these proverbs, there is no indication of a puzzlement regarding the essence of time. But since they are only four, it is not correct to make a generalization that having no question about it, he does not define it. It is safe rather to assert that these proverbs are intimations of what might be a Filipino's ultimate understanding of time.

There is ambivalence in the Filipino consciousness of time. On the one hand, he experiences it as cyclical, on the other, as linear. This experience of human time as cyclical in a Filipino's "lived-world" vibrates in every nook of the Philippines. A Filipino lives in a forward movement as he flips the pages of the calendar while looking forward in anxious or joyous anticipation of recurrent events (depending on how a particular phenomenon has touched him), traversing the seasons of Filipino time: Christmas, Lent (culminating in Easter), Summer, and School season, with the celebration of fiestas in honor of patron saints in-between. So, in the Filipino consciousness of time, there is as it were an "eternal recurrence." Time is not experienced as a mere passage of past, present and future. He is conscious (although majority of Filipinos may not be explicitly aware) of it as *that* which is meaningful because of meaningful accents, aside from living it in the rainy season (planting time) and hot season (harvest time). Perhaps it is not out of context to quote Mercado who says that "Since time for the Filipino is non-linear, the future, the present, and the past can somehow mingle."<sup>10</sup>

Nevertheless, he also experiences time as linear. A Filipino is aware that time is *that* which is beneath change—from being a child to becoming an adult, from ignorance to non-ignorance. The subtlety of this Filipino awareness of the linearity of "cosmic time" (to borrow Mercado's words) is explainable in terms of its being clothed in imagery as it surfaces in explicit communication.

Moreover, this ambivalence is unequivocal when a Filipino optimistically senses the timelessness of time, the "eternal recurrence" thing, and yet consumed in pessimism by the realization that "there is no more time" (*wala nay panahon*, in Cebuano). While he consoles himself now





and then with "*Babala na, may bukas pang darating,*" (depending on the person's character), he cannot quite fight the thought that "time waits for no one." And the latter must be the reason for the upsurge of a maddening emotion when reminded that "*walay pagbasol nga mag-una.*" Indeed, time goes on. An Ilonggo may say this in Hiligaynon,

*Ang kagahapon nagligad na,  
Muklata ang mata buas damlag.*

(Yesterday has passed;  
Open your eyes to the future.)<sup>11</sup>

Time is cyclical for a Filipino, yet linearity of "cosmic time" within "human time" is an undeniably persistent undercurrent in the proverbs herein analyzed.

To recapitulate, all that is said above briefly exhibits a Filipino's "holistic" understanding of time, that time is *that* which keeps going a spiralling movement of change; a spiral that "travels" straight in its cycles.

## Conclusion

Filipino philosophy as a discipline is not a controversial issue. It is a philosophical enterprise (to borrow John Kavanaugh's words) that goes on, with Filipino thinkers like Leonardo Mercado, Quintin Terrenal, Leonardo Estioko, Dionisio Miranda, Romualdo Abulad, Emerita Quito, Florentino Timbreza, Rolando Gripaldo, Roque Feriols, Manuel Dy Jr, Alfredo Co, to name some daring forerunners of a culture (as read in their writings or/and are still busily at it).

The course outline of a syllabus on Filipino Philosophy mentioned earlier is only a proposal. While there are numerous approaches to this subject, it is not merely wishful thinking to look up to the academe as the venue where this discipline will blossom although Filipino Philosophy as such may find its full maturation beyond its walls.

A part of a section in the aforementioned course outline, a Filipino philosophy of time through the proverbs that embody it, is explicated as, hopefully, an instantiation of doing Filipino Philosophy.

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 Endnotes

1. Cf. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. *History of Philosophy Eastern and Western*, "Introduction." Book is unavailable, so page cannot be located.
2. Romualdo Abulad. "The Filipino as a Philosopher in Search of Originality," *Karunungan* 2 (SOPHIA, XIV) Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Research Center (1985), 15.
3. \_\_\_\_\_. "Philosophy in the Philippines: Status and Prospects," (unpublished article) where he refers to Cicero's understanding of culture as cultivation of the soul; and that the cultivation of the soul is philosophy; and his saying that "there is no doubt that, in Cicero's mind philosophy constitutes the pinnacle of a people's cultural achievement" (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* II, V).
4. \_\_\_\_\_. *Op.Cit.* Manila, Philippines: De La Salle University Press (1984), 18-23.
5. Ibid.
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10. Mercado, *Op. Cit.*, 34.
11. Eugenio, *Op. Cit.*, Hlg – MLN, 648.