

BOOK REVIEW

Br. Romualdo E. Abulad, SVD, Ph. D. A Review of Leonardo N. Mercado's *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy* (Manila: Logos Publications, 2009), 166 pages.

Leonardo Mercado is a prolific Filipino philosopher, and he is *the* pioneer in Filipino philosophy. This is something no one should forget who is to say or write anything about him, including this latest work of his, harmlessly titled *Explorations in Filipino Philosophy*. The first superficial remark one can make of this book is that it should have been more rigorously edited before it was brought to the printing press, but that's only that – a superficial remark. Otherwise this is not unworthy of the man and the philosopher; I find many parts of it charming and very *Mercado*. His landmark work of 1974, for which he is best remembered, is serious and heavy, even humorless, when compared to this lightly handled material by a mature scholar who dares to continue with his own brand of thinking.

It is also helpful to keep in mind that the author is a religious missionary of the Society of Divine Word (SVD), and so it is no wonder that his approach even to philosophy is more anthropological than academic. Nay, this one is academic enough, but of an anthropological sort, which is why it is debatable whether this is really what constitutes philosophy. Mercado is more at home in the turf of Benjamin Lee Whorf than in that of either Wittgenstein or Heidegger, and yet he continues to use such words as analysis and phenomenology. He would rather align himself with the Orientals and yet has countless quotes from Western authors.

And that is what makes for the thorn in the philosophical flesh of Mercado, that there is no way for him to be consistent. He wants to think "in Philippine categories" (p. 39) but he cannot divorce himself from the English language which, he insists, carries an entire cultural baggage divorced from Tagalog or Cebuano or Ilocano. He seems to want to be a pure Filipino philosopher, a 'purist' then, but that's what his training and upbringing cannot possibly allow him anymore to become. Even the sources of his concept of a Filipino philosophy are not Filipino, for they are certainly borrowed from both East and West (yes, also the West). The borrowings from India and China are, too, none of them indigenously Filipino.

And so Mercado is not writing in Tagalog. But how about Tagalog itself – how free is it from admixture of Western words and concepts? And if one can give English equivalents to Cebuano, Tagalog and Ilocano expressions (see Chapter 5), where do we find here Filipino originality? The same ideas are in all

languages, then, including English which is undoubtedly Western. The only thing that perhaps remains purely indigenous is some words in the language, but even these are subject to the fluctuations of time and are thus capable of external influences.

In this age of postmodernity, exclusivism is already out of place, and it might be that the dream of Mercado (unless I don't get him correctly) can no longer hold. Anthropology will continue to do its work, but why can't philosophy do another? And why should I not read Western thinkers, as well as Eastern thinkers, in order that I might enrich my own heritage? That is hard and awesome labor, of course, but the other recourse could just be an excuse for the proverbial indolence of the Filipino. Still, after all that has been said and done, we give obeisance to Leonardo Mercado for his unmitigating work in the direction which he himself thankfully pioneered, *the* (or perhaps *a*) Filipino philosophy.